Hadrian Romanoff and the Beginning
by cabbieforhire

Summary

Harry Potter was destined to do great things under incredible odds. Hadrian Romanoff was destined to do even greater.

Taken in by the infamous Black Widow and raised alongside her merry band of fellows, Hadrian will return to the wizarding world and take it by storm.

Notes

Title : Hadrian Romanoff and the Beginning
Status : Rewrite.

Clint Barton, a handsome yet somehow still a nondescript man, stood in the darkened room of an average cottage in Godric's Hollow. He was dressed in dark, flexible body armor with a quiver of arrows on his back, a state of the art bow within easy reach. His eyes, hidden behind redundant sunglasses, were trained on the house directly across the street from him.

He had been sent to watch the house when a report came in a little over three hours beforehand. A large, unidentified spike of energy had caught the attention of the techs in charge of watching the various radars they had around the world. Since Clint and his partner were already in the area thanks to another - already completed - mission he had been chosen to check it out and determine what sort of situation it was.

In the beginning of his stake out there hadn't been much to observe. The house that they had tracked down as the source of the energy looked like any of the other houses lining the street. There were no lights, no sounds, though something was setting off Clint's sixth sense. There was something going on in Godric's Hollow, he was sure of it.

He got confirmation two hours in when a tall man with a long white beard wearing robes of all things appeared out of nowhere in front of the house he was watching. Clint readied his bow, waiting for the man to make a move.

The stranger raised both his arms skyward, something long and thin in his right hand, and made a complicated grand gesture. The air seemed to ripple and Clint watched with grim anticipation as the image of a perfectly normal cottage fell away only to be replaced with an explosion torn mess. A hole had been blasted through the walls, centered on the upper level, exposing the inside of the cottage to the elements.

Clint waited for several moments as the stranger made his way into the destroyed cottage before calling in the development. The bearded man seemed to be inspecting the site, perhaps searching for something, bursts of light appearing whenever he waved his right arm.

Clint reached over to a small table and picked up a compact camera. He snapped several pictures of the wrecked site, including close ups of the stranger who was still looking around.

Finally the man seemed to have finished what he came to do and he disappeared with a loud crack of a whip.

Ten minutes after the stranger had left Clint made to go investigate the cottage himself when another
A tall woman with dark hair appeared with a younger blonde woman following behind her, jotting down notes while an old fashioned camera floated in the air beside her. There were bright flashes of light as several pictures were taken; the brunette seemed to be speaking quickly while her assistant hurriedly wrote down everything she was saying. Even from where he was Clint could see that the blonde was glaring harshly at her boss' back whenever she wasn't looking.

"Ooh, hostile takeover coming soon," Clint whispered to himself.

He watched for another hour and a half as more and more people show up to pay their respects and celebrate. As time passed by they get noticeably drunker, stumbling around and shouting out slurred words. Clint caught 'free' and 'boy' and 'saved' the most.

It was easy to see that something big has happened with the wrecked cottage at the center of it. The only question was what.

When he'd been staking out the cottage for five hours he was more than ready to call it in. Nothing that required his expertise or attention was going on and he could pass this assignment off to another agent easily.

He packed away his bow carefully, partly out of respect for his weapon of choice, but mostly because he didn't want to hear the man who designed it bitch about not taking care of his toys. He was just about to do the same with his specially made arrows when a burst of blinding green light caught his attention from the side window.

Clint moved to look out the window but saw nothing except shrubbery and a few trees separating the property lines between the two houses. Just as he stepped away, he heard,

"Mummy!"

Moving quickly, Clint ran from the room, bounded down the stairs, and raced outside. He glanced around for a sign of where the cries were coming from but saw nothing.

"Mummy! Dada!"

Clint froze. Not quite believing it he tilted his head back to look up into the branches of a large tree. Nestled into the crook of a thick branch and the trunk was a handwoven basket, the edge of a baby blue blanket hanging out.

"The hell?"

"Mummy! Dada! I scared!"

Cursing under his breath, Clint ran forward before launching himself up, catching onto the lowest branch. He swung himself up and over, landing gracefully on his feet in a crouch. He ignored the sting of his palms where the bark bit into his skin. The kid kept calling out for his parents, pleading for someone to come help him.
Clint pulled himself up to the next branch which put him at just the right place to grab hold of the basket without risk of knocking it over. He grabbed it and held it close to his chest, not taking the time to look inside before he jumped to the ground, careful not to jostle the basket too much. Only once he was standing steadily on the ground did he finally look at who he had saved.

The child was a little boy with pale skin, rosy cheeks, a tuft of dark hair, and the brightest green eyes Clint had ever seen. There were tear tracks on his puffed out cheeks and his nose was running. He was wrapped haphazardly in a soft blanket and was wearing a white pyjama top with a cartoon lion stitched onto it.

On his forehead was a crude lightning bolt cut into his skin, marring the otherwise unblemished skin.

The boy stared up at Clint unblinkingly. "N't Mummy," he accused.

Clint's lips twitched. "No, definitely not your mom, little one." He teased. "So what were you doing all the way up there?"

"Wan' Mummy!"

"Alright, let's try something else. What's your name?" Clint asked as he began walking back into the house.

"H'rry,"

"Well, Harry, you and I are going to have a long conversation about appropriate places to play hide and seek." Clint poked the little boy's nose, making Harry giggle. Inside the house Clint turned on one of the lamps, bathing the room in a soft glow. He set the basket down on the floor before taking Harry out of it, settling him on the uncomfortable couch. When he did so an envelope fell out on to the ground.

It was addressed to a Petunia Dursley of Number Four Privet Drive. The letters were written in cursive, light against the stiff material and barely showed up in the low lighting of the room.

"Who's Petunia, bright eyes?" Clint asked half-heartedly. Harry peered up at him and shrugged, looking so uninterested that it made Clint laugh a little. "Alright then, care to tell me how you got all the way up in that tree?"

"H'me,"

"You live in a tree?" Clint teased before turning serious. "So, you were trying to get home." He said more to himself. "Mutant ability? Teleportation maybe? No, all those other people were popping in out of nowhere so unless there's a secret society of teleporting mutants I doubt it. And Harry showed up in a flash of light."

When no answers appeared to him Clint called in to request a replacement, giving a basic overview of what had happened so far. He neglected to mention that he had found a small child in a tree. After he put away his phone he turned back to the strangely calm boy, who was chewing contently on his blanket.

"Need anything?"

Harry ignored him, completely focused on eating his blanket.

Clint sighed then pulled the just as uncomfortable arm chair closer to the couch and sat down. He stared at Harry for several long moments.
"What is going on here, huh, bright eyes? A destroyed cottage, unknowns appearing out of nowhere to leave gifts and flowers, a baby flashing himself into a tree. Damn if it makes any sense,"

"You no say tat!" Harry admonished. "Ba' word!"

"I can say whatever I want. I'm a grown up," Clint countered.

Harry blew a raspberry then giggled - there was something familiar about the exchange for the little boy.

Clint clasped his hands together. "So here's what we're going to do. I'm going to go finish packing up, you're going to sit here and not vanish in a burst of light, then we're going to wait for my replacement to show up so we can meet with my partner and supervisor. That sound like a plan, buddy?"

"Sou'd like a pan, buddy," Harry repeated.

"Close enough." Clint quickly went upstairs to finish packing his things before returning. Harry hadn't moved in the short time and was once again mouthing at his blanket.

"Hawky, we go h'me now?"

Clint stopped short. "What did you call me?"

"Hawk!" Harry chirped.

"How do you know that name, big guy? Did someone tell you?" Clint asked intently, sitting down on the couch next to Harry. The boy stared back at him, his eyes glittering.

"Mummy say it."

"Uh huh," Clint murmured as he thought it over. "So your mom told you about someone named... Hawkeye?" Harry bobbed his head in answer. "Did she say anything else?"

Harry scrunched his face up as he tried to think of an answer. "Mummy say don' w'rry, Hawky and Widdy help. Ten she go to sleep."

"She went to sleep?"

"Yeah, Bad Man go 'haha!' and she go to sleep." Harry confirmed.

Clint cursed loudly, making Harry flinch back. "Sorry, big guy. Uh, do you think you can tell me your mom's name?"

"Mummy!"

"Of course it is," Clint sighed. He checked his watch. "We should be gone from here soon, big guy, so just sit tight."

Clint was half way through regaling Harry with the technically classified story of his and Natasha's trip to a small town in Maine when he heard the familiar sound of a SHIELD SUV pulling up. Clint got up and peeked out the window to be certain before he gathered Harry up in his arms, making sure to slip the envelope into the largest pocket of his pants.

There were three short knocks at the door followed by a plain man in a seemingly cheap suit walking into the house. He looked over Clint and Harry and to his credit didn't show any surprise.
"Report?"

"A cover up of sorts was placed over the site, hiding the damage, until an unknown man, white, old, long beard, came by and brought it down. Since then several more unknowns have appeared, leaving gifts and paying their respects. No chatter, no fights." Clint summarized. "Left my notes in the upstairs bedroom, facing the site."

The agent nodded then tossed a set of keys at Clint who caught it as he marched forward out of the house, Harry held tight to his chest.

Not having a car seat was a bit of a concern so Clint made do by setting Harry on his lap and driving slowly. A drive that normally would have taken only half an hour ended up taking fifty but Clint wasn't willing to risk hurting a child.

They pulled up to the temporary headquarters and as soon as Clint had put the car in park Harry began to fidget.

"You okay, bright eyes?" Clint carefully slid out of the car, moving Harry to rest on his hip. Harry started to squirm in his hold, forcing Clint to tighten his grip.

"Itty!"

"Itchy? You're itchy?" Harry didn't say anything else, only pouted, before a bright translucent green shield appeared around him, encircling him completely. Clint paused in his steps. "Well that's new."

It said a lot about SHIELD that a glowing baby barely warranted a second glance by the agents standing at the entrance. Clint was quickly checked in and Harry was given a visitor's badge because apparently Sophie Jenkins from the Front Desk has a sense of humor.

Clint strolled confidently through the base. Harry had calmed down in his hold and was gnawing at Clint's shoulder. The shield was still holding strong.

They met Coulson and Natasha in a debriefing room which had been taken over by a certain supervisor and turned into a coffee room. Neither of them showed any surprise at the sight of Clint holding a child, only offering eyebrows raised in sync.

Clint opened his mouth to explain but was interrupted.

"Mummy!" Harry cried out, disappearing from Clint's hold in a bright light and reappearing in front of Natasha. She reflexively caught him before he fell to the ground. He patted her chest happily, smiling widely. The shield was gone.

"Think you could watch him for a bit, Nat? Cool, thanks." Clint moved to take a seat at the small round table. Natasha glared at him but didn't set Harry down or try to hand him off to Coulson, who looked faintly amused with the whole thing. Clint grinned then pulled out the envelope, easily opening it without damaging the wax seal.

"What is that?" Natasha asked. Harry was playing with a lock of her hair, pulling the curl and letting it go to watch it bounce back into shape.

"A letter I found in the basket Harry was in." Clint answered. His brow furrowed as he read. "Okay, so his name is Harry Potter and the site we were watching was where he lived with his parents who..." Clint glanced up at Harry before averting his eyes. "Who were murdered on Halloween
night by someone known as a dark wizard."

"Dark wizard? Sounds like we stumbled upon Britain's magical community, otherwise known as the wizarding world." Coulson said.

"Wizarding world?" Clint repeated incredulously.

"Yes." Coulson said simply. "It's been around for as long as anyone can remember. Wands, potions, turning people into frogs, the whole bit. We don't have a very comprehensive file on them but still more than they'd be comfortable with given their penchant for removing the memories of magical happenings from non-magical people." He explained.

"S.H.I.E.L.D doesn't have a lot of information on these guys?"

"Magical communities as a whole? We know everything. Britain's? We didn't even know who was in charge until thirteen years ago when one of the recruits came to us. He was a first generation wizard, what they refer to as a muggleborn, who thanks to prejudice against 'non-pure' bloodlines was unable to make a living in the community and didn't have a lot of options outside of that since he had been removed from the non-magical world for so long while he attended a magical school." Coulson leaned back against the wall. "According to Agent Callaghan they're an insular community that focuses primarily on wealth and lineage. Those who don't come from strictly magical families are looked down on by those that do and since the 'purebloods', as they like to call themselves, hold most of the power, first and most second generations don't have a lot of options."

Clint skimmed through the letter again while he tried to put his thoughts and questions in order. "You said this Agent Callaghan wasn't able to find work in the non-magical world because of his schooling. Why?"

"The school is as isolated as they come. Once a magical child is located, a representative of the school visits them to explain about the 'odd occurrences' that have been happening throughout their childhood. They're offered an invitation to a premiere magical learning institute where they can learn to control their magic." Coulson explained dryly, not sounding impressed.

"Right," Clint drawled.

"What's the catch?" Natasha added.

The ends of Coulson's mouth twitched. "What they don't explain to the family is that the only offered classes revolve entirely around spells and potions. Even the history and arithmetics only focus on magical history and the magical property of numbers."

"So whatever education they get is useless outside of this community. How long do they go to this school for?" Natasha asked, moving to sit at the table across from Clint and placing Harry on her lap.

"Seven years. They get the invitation when they turn eleven, which is the age children Britain's magical community start school, and graduate at seventeen." Coulson answered.

Clint scoffed. "So they're basically missing out on the most important years of school and the parents don't know this until it's too late." Coulson nodded.

"What about that lineage prejudice?" Natasha questioned.

"Here's how it goes. There are people without magic, which they call muggles. If two of these 'muggles' have a magical child then they're a 'muggleborn'. If the parents consist of one muggle and magical or a 'pureblood' and a 'muggleborn' and they have a magical child then they're a 'half blood'."
To be a pureblood the rule is that your parents and all four of your grandparents have to be magical, though of course the farther back the line goes, the better. If two magicals have a child that doesn't have magic, they're referred to as 'squibs'.

"Squids?" Clint interrupted.

"No, squibs. Emphasis on the 'B', agent." Coulson smirked. "As I was saying, if a magical family produces a squib they're usually cast out of the family and abandoned in the non-magical world. It's considered a disgrace to the old families."

Natasha's face shut down. "They send their children away because they don't have magic?"

"Some. There are old families who don't particularly care about lineage, though they still use theirs to their advantage." Coulson shrugged. "The hierarchy goes pureblood, half blood, muggleborn, squib, muggle. As such there is hardly any non-magical influence in the community, such as the school classes and the technology. First generations - muggleborns - have the hardest time finding a place in the community. Despite spending at least seven years in the community they don't know much in the way of magical customs or traditions because they aren't taught, they don't have the familial connections to get good jobs straight out of school, and they can't turn to their old world because they're just as out of touch. Most that return to the non-magical world resort to petty crime or they join the military, which is where we found Agent Callaghan."

"So these kids are offered this fantastic opportunity, where they can learn magic and be part of a whole other society. Only they aren't told that there won't be anything they're familiar with, that they're going to be looked down because of their parents, and that once they finish school they won't have any prospects. Wonderful." Natasha glowered, prompting Harry to reach up and try to pull her lips into a smile. The gesture relaxed her and Harry noticed, happily returning to playing with her hair.

"It's a scam." Clint commented. "The whole thing is a big scam. They probably have to pay a hefty tuition, don't they?" Coulson nodded. "They pay for a next to useless education and once they graduate, there's no more use for them."

Natasha remained silent for several moments. "Clint, what does the letter say?"

"It's addressed to Petunia Dursley of Number Four Privet Drive. It says that she's Harry's aunt, and only surviving relative, on his mom's side. She doesn't seem to be magical," he started. "In fact it seems that whoever wrote this is trying their damn hardest to convince this Dursley woman to take her nephew in, talking about 'family protection' that will 'keep them hidden from those of less than reputable positions who would seek out to hurt those close to Lily and James Potter'. Man, this guy is laying it on thick." Clint commented. "Uh, it says that her sister and her brother in law were 'tragically struck down as casualties in war now past.' Basically, the Potters were killed by an enemy in whatever war they were fighting and only Harry survived."

"Let me see," Natasha leaned forward, reaching for the letter. "Is this parchment?"

"Paper hasn't been introduced to the British magical community." Coulson said absently. "Who's the letter from?"

"Albus Dumbledore. Know him?" Clint added when he saw recognition on Coulson's face.

"He's the headmaster of the school. Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry."

"Hogwarts?" Clint sputtered.
"Aren't witchcraft and wizardry the same thing?" Natasha pointed out.

"How do you know all this?" Clint added. "I hadn't even heard of these communities and you seem to know everything SHIELD does."

"I read the report." Coulson said simply.

Clint looked at his supervisor with suspicion. "You read all the reports SHIELD sends out, don't you? Like, literally all of them."

"Why would the headmaster be so directly involved in the placing of an orphan?" Natasha asked, bringing the conversation back around.

"Not sure. I'll have someone look into it. Besides Callaghan, we have a few more disenchanted magicals in our ranks."

Natasha finished reading through the letter for the third time and set it down. She looked down at Harry who peered back up at her. She raised her hand and gently ran it over the cut on his forehead. Harry closed his eyes in contentment.

A soft, golden glow emanated from Harry, slowly spreading to cover the little boy entirely before reaching out and wrapping around Natasha as well. It held for a minute, pulsing brightly, two tendrils of light spreading out to touch Clint and Coulson, before suddenly turning blinding and bursting, a shower of sparklers raining down on everyone in the room.

"Writty!" Harry reached out to try to catch the pretty lights, giggling.

"What just happened?" Clint refrained from jumping out his chair in alarm.

"Not sure. I'll have Callaghan and the others look at the footage, see if they recognize it. It might just be a case of 'accidental magic', where magical children cause things to happen without meaning to, usually in a case of extreme emotion." Coulson explained. He made to leave the room to go start of up the paperwork when Clint spoke;

"There's something else. Back at the watch house Harry called me 'Hawky'." Clint started. "When I asked him about it he said his mom told him 'don't worry, Hawkeye and Black Widow will help you.' He said that after that she... went to sleep." He trailed off with emphasis.

Coulson looked between the two agents. "Well, we know she was a witch. Psychic isn't that far of a leap. One of the electives at Hogwarts is Divination as well."

"Like tea reading and crystal balls?"

"Exactly. I'll add it to the list of things to check out." Coulson held out his hand and Natasha passed him the letter. "I'll have Evidence go over this and have the names ran. Clint mentioned he found Harry in a basket which sounds like Dumbledore intended on making Harry a porch baby so it's probably not a good idea to just ship the boy off without checking it out."

Clint nodded. "Right. There's got to be something going on if this guy was going to explain everything through a letter without really explaining anything. Do we keep the little guy for the night until they're cleared?"

"If they're cleared," Natasha added.

"Why not? He obviously likes the two of you and it's only for the night. You don't need to be back
"Well, isn't that sweet."

Clint's head snapped up at the voice. He had been dozing in one of the cots placed in the shift change room. He looked around the room and saw Coulson standing in the doorway and Natasha and Harry were laying down in the cot next to his.

Natasha was curled around Harry protectively, one of her hands placed against his chest - making sure he kept breathing - and the other placed under her pillow, where Clint knew a gun was hidden. Harry was snoring lightly, drool gathering at the corner of his open mouth. His blanket was clutched tightly in his small fist.

"Oh, I wouldn't say that," Clint said even as he nodded his head and made a heart with his hands.

"I saw that," Natasha said sleepily, her eyes still closed.

"I would hope so." Clint retorted. Her arm moved just slightly and Clint picked up the sound of a gun cocking. "Understood."

"How'd the background checks go?" Natasha asked as she pulled herself up into a sitting position, careful not to jostle Harry too much.

Coulson stepped forward and sat at the end of Clint's cot, holding out two folders. "Albus Dumbledore, Headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot, Supreme Mugwump of the International Confederation of Wizards, Masters in Transfiguration, and Alchemy Apprentice." Coulson recited while Clint and Natasha looked through the files. "The Wizengamot is the closest equivalent of Congress they have and the International Confederation is the magical UN."

"He's cited as being a firm believer of 'blood equality' and 'creature rights' but there's not much showing him putting his money where his mouth is," Clint mused.

"So he talks a big game, has plenty of power to back it up, but from what I can tell he's only pushed through two laws that actively help first generation magicals." Natasha added. "What's he doing placing a child somewhere?"

"Most likely because he took advantage of the chaos happening in the community. On Halloween night the Potters were killed by a dark wizard, who we've now identified as the Dark Lord Voldemort," Coulson paused, allowing both agents to let out snorts of disbelief. "Now the Potter family is one of those old families I mentioned, in fact its one of the oldest and is part of something known as The Court but they were known to champion for equal rights. This Voldemort guy made his name by proposing a 'blood revolution'. He gathered all the bigoted and rich and attempted to 'cleanse the wizarding world of the filthy mudbloods who seek to destroy their way of life' and threw the society into a civil war that lasted for years."

"I'm guessing that's the war Dumbledore said was over. What does Harry have to do with that?" Clint asked.

"Harry's the one that ended the war." Natasha stated incredulously.

"What?"
"Harry's been credited with vanquishing the worst Dark Lord of the century, surviving something known as the Killing Curse while he was at it," Coulson explained calmly. "He's the first person since the creation of the cursed to do so."

"They're calling him the Boy-Who-Lived." Natasha said in disgust. "It's like they're just ignoring that his parents died along side this Voldemort."

"A child is their hero." Clint shook his head.

"So Dumbledore has some investment in this and decides to squirrel the little guy away while everyone is celebrating the end of the war. What about the Dursleys?"

Coulson gestured at the folder. "Near the back."

Clint flipped through the pages, his eyes darting back and forth while Natasha read at a more sedate pace. "Vernon and Petunia Dursley, married three years ago, have a son named Dudley. Ooh, poor guy." Clint winced in sympathy. "Alright, Vernon works for some place called Grunnings and is currently being evaluated for a promotion in the company. Petunia is a stay at home mom, though she does have a realtor license. There's nothing of note in their background. They're almost disgustingly normal."

Natasha nodded in agreement. "There's no reason not to let them take Harry in. No criminal record, no financial trouble, and they have a son around the same age."

"We can drop Harry off tomorrow, tell them what we know, and maybe find out a little more about things." Coulson said.

"What about the investigation?" Clint asked.

"We'll keep on it until everything is cleared up. Like why would the leader of the uprising personally go after the Potters."

Clint turned to look at the sleeping form of Harry. "Is the little guy going to need protective detail?"

Coulson took a deep breath. "Most likely. His involvement in the defeat of this dark wizard is going to make him a target by his followers. We'll need to discuss it with the Dursleys but I don't seem them turning the protection down."

"No, but they might turn him down." Natasha said. "They might not be willing to take in Harry if it puts their family in danger, even if he is their family. Their son's safety should be their first priority."

"Well, if he's such a celebrity then there's bound to be a bunch of people who want to take him in. Not to mention close friends of the Potters. We'll just have to make sure he goes to a good person or family who want more than the publicity." Clint said.

"I'll start the paperwork."
Clint woke up twenty minutes earlier than he had planned. Harry was sitting on his chest, staring down blankly at the man. Clint looked around and saw that besides him and Natasha, four other agents were sleeping in the room.

"What's up, bright eyes?" Clint asked tiredly, rubbing the sleep out of his eyes.

"Potty,"

"It's down the hall." Clint tried.

"Potty!" Harry whined. One of the other agents made a muffled noise and shifted in his cot.

Clint groaned but pushed himself up. "Alright, alright. Come on." He lifted Harry up as he swung his feet over the side of the cot. "You couldn't wake up Nat because?"

"Dada tu'n." Harry answered solemnly with a serious nod of his head.

Clint rolled his eyes. "Of course it is. And of course you memorized the schedule. You weirdo."

By the time Harry had done his business and they had returned Natasha had woken up and was getting dressed. "Coulson sent out someone to get a car seat while we slept for the drive over. If the Dursleys decide to take him in we can leave it with them."

"By 'sent someone' you mean Coulson went to Babies 'R Us and browsed for an hour making sure he got the perfect seat for half the price?" Clint teased, setting Harry down to change his own clothes. "No peeking, little guy."

"Blegh,"

Natasha let out an airy laugh at Harry's reaction, earning a giggle and applause from the little boy. With a small grin, Natasha reached over to ruffle what little hair Harry had. Clint turned around just in time to see the action. He pretended not to have, though, covering it up by slipping a clean shirt over his head and looking away.

"You ready, bright eyes?"

"You r'dy, Bin Hoo'?"

"Natasha!"
The car was silent as they turned onto Privet Drive. The houses that lined the street all looked remarkably the same and all like they were out of a Hallmark advertisement. Clint nearly missed Number Four because of how alike it all was.

He pulled into the driveway next to a car with worn out tires. "Are we sure this isn't Mayberry?"

"Shut up, Barton."

"Roger that, Romanoff." Clint saluted. He twisted in his seat to look back at Harry, who was sitting quietly in a black and blue car seat, his blanket across his lap and a sippy cup with water down apple juice in his hand. "You ready to meet your Auntie Petunia, big guy?"

"Tuna!" Harry exclaimed excitedly.

"Eh, close enough." Clint shrugged.

Natasha rolled her eyes as she stepped out of the car and opened the back door to unbuckle Harry. Clint climbed out as well and waited until she made her way towards the door with Harry on her hip to move. When they were standing in front of the door they took a few seconds to relax themselves so they wouldn't look threatening before Clint rang the doorbell.

It only took a few moments before they heard the sounds of someone moving around inside. The door swung open to reveal a thin, pinched face woman with perfectly done hair and nails wearing a dress Clint had only ever seen in fifties sitcoms. "Oh, hello. How may I help you?"

"Petunia Dursley?" Clint inquired, trying to sound all business but affable as well.

The woman shifted. "Yes, that's me. And who might you be?"

"Agent Barton, this is Agent Romanoff. Would you mind if we came in for a bit?" He deftly pulled out his badge to show her, holding it open just long enough for her to get a good look at it before it disappeared from view again.

Petunia's eyes drifted over to the familiar little boy in Natasha's hold, his eyes standing out to her most of all. "Is that...?" She trailed off. She knew it was who she thought it was. While she hadn't kept them, she remembered very well the pictures her sister had sent her of her nephew.

"If you mean your nephew Harry, then yes." Clint said shortly. "May we come in?"

"O-of course," Petunia stepped to the side, allowing Clint and Natasha to step through into the house. "My husband is upstairs in the shower and my son is still asleep so if you wouldn't mind not causing much noise," Petunia fretted as she led them to the sitting room. "Would you like some tea or coffee? I've put a pot on."

Clint smiled. "No, thank you, ma'am." He waited until both Petunia and Natasha had sat down before taking a seat himself.

Petunia shifted nervously, her thin hands playing at the hem of her dress. "What's this all about?"

"Mrs. Dursley."

"Petunia, please."

Clint nodded. "Petunia, when's the last time you spoke to your sister, Lily?"

Petunia's face closed off. "You're one of them, aren't you? One of those people that came in and
ruined my life and took Lily away to be a, a-" She cut herself off and looked away, staring at one of the photos on the wall.

"If by 'one of them' you mean 'magical' then no, we are not one of them." Clint said slowly after sharing a look with his partner.

"Then what do you want with me then? Asking about her. And why do you have my- her child with you?" Petunia spoke bitterly.

"Petunia, your sister and her husband were murdered several nights ago in a terrorist attack. Harry was the only survivor." Clint said softly.

All the color drained from Petunia's face and her hands clenched into tight fists. She looked terrified and lost before her expression changed to one of anger. She shot to her feet. "I told her! I told her that being taken in with those people would only mean bad things for her but she wouldn't listen! She was too caught up in all the fantasy and mystic of it all to listen to her normal, boring big sister, wasn't she? And now she's dead because of them! Because of that man!"

Clint wasn't sure if she meant the headmaster for inviting Lily to Hogwarts, James for proposing to Lily and keeping her in the magical community, or the man who murdered Lily in cold blood. He was sure that Petunia and Lily weren't close and hadn't been for years, more than likely stemming back to when Lily's abilities were discovered. It happened enough with children with the X gene who had siblings that didn't - jealously and resentment from both sides often destroyed whatever relationship they had before, no matter how strong.

Petunia turned to stare down at Harry, who was trying to burrow into Natasha's side, scared because of the shouting. "And what do you expect me to do with him, huh? Take him in, raise him alongside my sweet baby, just waiting for the day that damned letter will arrive and he'll be off learning to be a freak as well? Is that it!"

"Mrs. Dursley," Clint said pointedly, all niceties gone. He laid a calming hand on Natasha's knee to keep her from eviscerating the woman. "All we need to know is whether or not you and your husband are willing to take Harry in. If not, you need to tell us now so that we can make other arrangements."

"I won't. I won't take that boy in. I won't allow it." Petunia said sternly, crossing her arms over her chest. "I just want a nice, quiet, normal life. Taking him in won't allow that. I won't do it."

Clint took a deep breath to steady himself. He wasn't going to allow her to rile him up. "Then you'll need to sign any guardianship over to the state."

"How do I do that?" Petunia asked, her righteous anger fading from her, leaving her looking worn.

"A signed statement saying that you have no wish or desire to take Harry in will do." Natasha said, sounding detached.

"Alright then. Give me a moment and I'll do just that," Petunia walked from the room, the tension lessening just slightly with each step.

"Can we shoot her?"

"Too much paperwork."

"Damn."
"No like Tuna."

Petunia returned shortly with a folded sheet of paper which she thrust in Clint's direction. "Here. Now if you wouldn't mind getting out of my house before husband comes downstairs."

"Of course not, ma'am." Clint waited for Natasha to stand up before they made their way to the front door. They were just about to step out when Petunia called for them to wait.

She walked up to them, holding a pair of stitched booties in her hand. "She made these for my son. They haven't been used."

Clint looked over Petunia appraisingly before reaching out to take the offered gift. "Thank you. I'm sure he'll appreciate having something made by his mother."
Petunia only nodded.

"Goodbye, Mrs. Dursley,"

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Harry sat in Natasha's lap, listening intently as she told him a Russian fairy tale - in Russian of course. He had been upset since the meeting with his aunt, repeatedly telling Clint and Natasha that he didn't 'like Tuna' and wanting to go home. He had also clung to Natasha, hiding his face in her chest and clutching at her hair.

Clint was reporting to Coulson about what happened at Number Four Privet Drive, speaking in a hushed voice. Coulson looked impassive as he listened, but that could mean anything.

"Mummy, I hungry," Harry whined.

"I'm not your mother, Harry." Natasha said. "What do you want to eat?"

"Mash totos!"

"Mashed potatoes?"

"Yummy!"

Natasha rolled her eyes. "Clint, go get Harry some mashed potatoes and juice."

"Why can't you do it, Mummy?" Clint asked without turning his head to look at his partner.

"I can kill you with a straw," Natasha promised.

"Blah, blah, blah," Clint mocked but still spun on his heel and walked off in the direction of the kitchens.

Coulson grinned as he stepped closer to Natasha and Harry. "Since Mrs. Dursley has made her stance on the subject quite clear we're going to have to place Harry with an adoptive family. Preferably one who knows about the magical community, though meta-human foster home wouldn't be the worse option." Natasha nodded. It wouldn't be difficult to convince the people who opened their homes to abandoned mutants and superhumans to take in a child with magic. They were well used to having to deal with strange occurrences that always happened with children with abilities. "We should also check into the Potters. Since they were in the middle of a war it's likely that they set up contingencies in case anything happened to him. Harry may have appointed guardians that Dumbledore overlooked for whatever reason."
"Callaghan sent me a report on what's going on in the British magical community. Harry's being lauded as the Savior of the Wizarding World and everyone wants a piece of him. People are naming him in their wills, they're gifting him estates and heirlooms. It's all chaos and Harry, for better or worse, is in the middle of it all."

"Harry will need to placed soon or people will start campaigning for him." Natasha concluded.

"Callaghan spoke about a bank run by goblins," Natasha arched an eyebrow at that information. "They handle all the money in the British magical community as well as the executions of wills and tracking heritages. The security is very strict and proof of identity goes a bit farther than proof of address and a birth certificate. They use blood." Coulson clarified.

Natasha hummed. "Harry will need to be presented personally for us to get any access to his files, including whatever will his parents may have left behind."

Coulson rocked on his feet for a short moment, his face serene. Natasha was immediately suspicious. "Don't you think you and Barton are getting a little... close?"

Natasha turned her head away. "I'm doing what I must." She didn't explain what she meant and Coulson didn't push the matter further.

"Harry has godparents," Clint stated, staring intensely at the file in his hands.

He was careful not to speak to loudly so that he wouldn't wake up Harry. The little boy had returned from the trip to Gringotts Bank exhausted and grumpy - as soon as he caught sight of Natasha he had disappeared from the stroller Agent Keller was pushing and reappeared in her arms. Keller had smiled and said something about the stories maybe being right. Natasha had carried Harry back to the room where Clint was waiting impatiently and had laid him down on the table with his head pillowed by her jacket and covered by his blanket.

Clint spared a glance at the boy before turned back to the file.

"Sirius Orion Black and Alice Johanna Longbottom neé Egerton. Alice has been declared incapable seeing as she's in a long term care unit at some hospital."

"And Black?"

"Currently being held in Azkaban until his trial. He's been accused of betraying the Potters' location to the enemy, directly resulting in their deaths." Clint read aloud.

Natasha reached over and snatched the file from his hands. She flipped through the pages quickly, her eyes darting back and forth. Finally she snorted and tossed the folder back to Clint. "Their investigation is a joke. They found him at the scene of another explosion, reportedly caused by Black though there's no evidence showing that he's behind it, and immediately cuffed him and locked him up. In fact there only evidence is that he was something known as the Potters' Secret Keeper, which everyone supposedly knew, and that he 'confessed', saying that it was all his fault." Natasha gave Clint a knowing look. "His trial has been also been scheduled for 'when things settle down.'"

"It actually says that?" Clint snorted when Natasha nodded. "So this guy is never getting a trial. Why, though?"

"A civil war involving the people who hold most of the power in their society? It's a cover up. The ones who aren't directly involved want to get things over with quickly to show that they're being pro-
active, whether or not they're getting the right guy doesn't matter. The ones who are involved aren't
going to speak up when someone else is going down for their crimes." Natasha said. She reached
over and pointed at a specific paragraph in the file. "Black's been given the illustrious title of the
'Dark Lord's Right Hand.' If he is then keeping him from being questioned lessens the chance that
he'll rat out the others to save his own hide..."

"And if he isn't then he'll be released and people will start looking into others, actual guilty ones."
Clint finished. "We getting involved?" Natasha didn't answer. "Come on, Nat, it's me. I know
something's going on with you and it has to do with Harry. I get it, I do. I feel it, too, but I think it's
strongest with you. And I think it has something to do with that light show Harry did when you two
first met."

Natasha glared at him. "You think he did something."

Clint held her harsh gaze steadily. "I think that he's a little boy with a gift who just went through
something traumatic and latched on to the first bit of familiarity he could."

"And what about me is familiar?" Natasha spat.

"Maybe it's because you're a woman, maybe something about how you look, maybe it was even
how you smelled. I don't know. But you can't deny that Harry likes you."

"I like him, too." Natasha admitted quietly.

"So let this go where it needs to."

Natasha shook her head. "We both know what that means."

They sat in silence for over ten minutes, neither of them moving. Natasha was going over everything
that could wrong in her head, again and again, trying to find an argument that her partner wouldn't
blast through with a counter or just straight stubbornness. Clint was also going over everything
Natasha would think could go wrong and was prepared to rip through anything she could say, even
if his arguments made no sense.

He could see the moment when she knew she would lose to his stubborn streak and childishness. It
was the same moment that Harry woke up from his nap and reached out his small hands for Natasha.

"He's going to need a name you know, unless you just want him to be Harry Romanoff,"

"Rom'n! Rom'n!" Harry giggled.

Natasha smiled softly and traced his scar. "Roman, huh?"

"What, bright eyes, you wanna be called Roman Romanoff. We can make it happen but you'll have
to watch out on the playground." Clint teased. Harry stuck his tongue out at him.

"How about a compromise?" Natasha offered seriously. "How do you feel about the name
Hadrian?"

Something in Harry's eyes glittered and he threw his head back and laughed. "'Rian! 'Rian!" Clint
smiled at the little boy then looked up back at Natasha and mouthed the name in question.

"Hadrian was a Roman emperor who built Hadrian's Wall, rebuilt the Pantheon, and constructed the
Temple of Venus and Roma." Natasha stated.
"And you just know that off the top of your head?" Clint asked in disbelief.


"Oh, I'm sure."

"Harry," Natasha called.

"S'ush, Bin Hoo!"

The cell was dark and cold and bitter and wet. Misery had seeped into the bricks and insanity was a part of the foundation itself. Echoing howls of prisoners long lost to their minds filled the hollow walls, calls for mercy and vengeance and wishes for death.

Sirius Black snorted, an odd sound in his current form and an act that sent up dust from the floor. He must have already lost his mind if he was waxing poetic about this soul sucking place. Though he knew he hadn't been there long enough for the dementors to have much of an effect on him, especially with his hidden ace.

He never would have figured that being an Animagus would give him added protection against the mind altering and soul sucking monsters that guarded the prison he was trapped in but he wasn't going to look a gift horse in the mouth. When he was Padfoot everything was simpler - his thoughts, his emotions, it gave the dementors less to disturb. If he could just hold out in his shifted form until he was finally called in to be questioned about that horrible night it would all be okay. He could let everyone know who the real traitor was, he could apologize to Remus for ever thinking he was the spy just because of his furry problem, and he could drag Remus home with him so they could raise Harry together.

He had thought that he would be given a trial as soon as possible given the crimes he was accused of but he had counted fourteen days had passed at the very least and the only time the human guards came around were to toss him stale bread and a half filled jug of water and to mock him for being a coward and dirty Death Eater. He couldn't wait until his innocence was proven so he could rub in all their faces. He would make a point of remembering the faces of all of them just to do so.

Sirius' thoughts were interrupted when he heard the sound of footsteps approaching him. He quickly shifted back and threw himself onto the pitiful cot he was meant to sleep in. He closed his eyes and pretended to be asleep.

"Wake up, scum," A gruff voice ordered, accompanied by someone rattling the bars. Sirius made a show of being jolted awake.

"What's going on?" Sirius asked roughly. The sound of his own voice was strange to him. He felt the warmth of hope begin to fill him at the thought of finally being given a chance to let the truth out.

The guard, a burly man with rotten teeth, grinned nastily at Sirius through the bars while his partner chuckled and slowly unlocked the cell.

"We're finally gonna know all your dirty little secrets, traitor."

Sirius' mind went blank for a short moment before it restarted. A bright smile overtook his face when he caught on to the implications, showing how handsome he was even covered in grime and sunken in from lack of food. "A trial, then. About time." He said brightly, earning baffled and suspicious looks from the guards.
Sirius jumped from the cot excitedly. He gladly held out his wrists for them to cuff. "Well, let's get to it then. Don't wanna keep the good people waiting."

When Sirius was led in front of the Wizengamot he was whistling as if he was without a care in the world. The action appalled the members and they were further offended when he raised his cuffed hands to send them a little wave. Murmurs fill the room, most wondering about the state of his mind.

One of the guard pushed Sirius towards the raised chair in the middle of the room. He stumbled over to it and sat down, tensing against the cold stone. The guards quickly strapped him down, jerking him about roughly. He gazed up at the glaring faces of the Wizengamot and found that it pained him to see hatred in the eyes of witches and wizards he once called friends.

Sirius turned his head when he heard the door open and saw Albus Dumbledore stride confidently in. The old man made his way to the chair raised over the atrium.

"The Chief Warlock now calls this sentencing to order." A young wizard Sirius didn't recognize announced, his voice punctuated by Dumbledore banging his gavel three times.

"Greetings respected members of the Wizengamot. On this day of November twenty second we bring convicted prisoner Sirius Black, Heir Apparent of the Most Ancient and Most Noble House of Black, to be questioned under the effects of veritaserum. He is accused of betraying the sacrality of being named Secret Keeper to ones James Charlus and Lily Marie Potter as well as their young son Harrison James Potter. He is further charged with the brutal slaying of the light wizard and war hero Peter Pettigrew as well as twelve innocent muggles through the use of a dark curse." Dumbledore intoned, his eyes boring into Sirius'. Sirius wanted to rip free from his restraints and then rip the old man's face off. Even if they believed he had been the traitor he knew that Peter hadn't used some dark curse to blow the street up. He had replayed that scene over and over in his head while he had been imprisoned - it had been a simple blasting hex. He settled for baring his teeth at the old wizard. "Let the trial begin. Auror McKellan, proceed."

A man Sirius recognized from the auror training program stepped forward holding a vial of a clear liquid. He administered three drops into a willing Sirius' mouth and waited a moment for the serum to take affect.

Sirius' eyes glazed over and it felt like a fog was wading through his head - everything was clear and blurred at the same time.

"Baseline questions will be asked to prove the efficiency of the veritaserum." McKellan addressed the audience. "Prisoner Three-Nine-Zero-Four-Two, please state your full name and titles such as they are."


The young wizard stationed next to Dumbledore read through something before nodding at McKellan. "Confirmed."

"Prisoner Three-Nine-Zero-Four-Two, what is your connection to one Lord James Charlus Potter?" McKellan asked slowly.
"We were housemates as well as teammates for the Gryffindor House Quidditch team as well as Named Friends and Brothers Proxy." Sirius answered, his clouded eyes staring into the questioning auror's own.

"Confirmed."

McKellan nodded. "Prisoner Three-Nine-Zero-Four-Two, have you ever committed a crime that you have not been charged with?"

"Yes."

Chaos erupted from the stands. There were calls for him to be Kissed right at that moment and shouts to let him be subjected to those he betrayed. McKellan raised his wand and brought it down sharply, the sound of a cannon filling the room and shocking everyone into silence. "I would ask that the esteemed members of the Wizengamot to keep their silence until the proceedings have ended." He turned back to face Sirius once he was sure they would listen. "Prisoner Three-Nine-Zero-Four-Two, please state for the record the nature of your crime."

"I am an unregistered Animagus and have been for six years." Sirius admitted. His confession brought confused murmuring from the audience.

McKellan blinked before regaining his composure. "Prisoner Three-Nine-Zero-Four-Two, were you named Secret Keeper for the location of James, Lily, and Harrison Potter?"

Sirius attempted to sit up straighter. "No."

McKellan raised his wand in warning before there could be any reaction from the watching members. That simple answer had cut through everyone's reason of being there and they weren't sure what was going on. They had been certain Sirius Black had been the Secret Keeper, everyone in the wizarding world had known - he had to have betrayed the family he was meant to keep safe.

"Prisoner Three-Nine-Zero-Four-Two, were you aware of who had been named Secret Keeper for the location of James, Lily, and Harrison Potter?" McKellan asked intensely.

"Yes." Sirius answered simply. He attempted to give more of an answer but he felt something keep his mouth shut, overriding the effects of the veritaserum.

"Prisoner Three-Nine-Zero-Four-Two, can you name the Secret Keeper for the location of James, Lily, and Harrison Potter?"

Sirius opened his mouth to answer but found himself unable to. He tried several times but was unsuccessful each time.

"Chief Warlock and Court Archivist, please note that Prisoner Three-Nine-Zero-Four-Two is still under the influence of the Fidelius Charm, showing that the Secret Keeper is still alive." McKellan directed at Dumbledore and the wizard writing the trial transcript.

"Noted, Auror McKellan."

"Members of the Wizengamot I will now attempt to discover who the Secret Keeper was by going through those close to the Potters one by one and observing who Prisoner Three-Nine-Zero-Four-Two is unable to give a conclusive answer for. I hope for your patience." McKellan declared. He turned back to Sirius, who was waiting eagerly.

"Was Remus John Lupin the named Secret Keeper for the location of James, Lily, and Harrison
Potter?"
"No."

"Was Alice Johanna Longbottom the named Secret Keeper for the location of James, Lily, and Harrison Potter?"

"No."

"Was Peter Edgar Pettigrew the name Secret Keeper for the location of James, Lily, and Harrison Potter?"

Sirius opened his mouth but nothing came out - a confirmation in itself.

"Let it be noted that the inability to answer in the negative or positive reveals that Peter Edgar Pettigrew was the named Secret Keeper for the Potters." McKellan said. "Prisoner Three-Nine-Zero-Four-Two, was the act of betrayal by someone close to you what prompted you to attack Peter Pettigrew on November seventh?"

"No."

McKellan startled slightly in surprise while whispers rose up once more between the Wizengamot. The auror quickly regained himself and pushed forward. "Prisoner Three-Nine-Zero-Four-Two, were you behind the attack on Lovett Street on November seventh?"

"No."

McKellan nodded his head as if that answer confirmed something for him. "At this time I call for Prisoner Three-Nine-Zero-Four-Two to be further addressed by his given name, Sirius Orion Black, as questioning has shown that he is not guilty of the charges levied against him. Chief Warlock?"

Dumbledore tore his eyes away from the smug Sirius to look at McKellan. "Agreed, Auror McKellan."

"At this time I will administer the antidote to the veritaserum. All charges against Sirius Black will at this moment be dropped and he will be questioned as witness." McKellan declared, a jab of his wand undoing the straps holding Sirius down.

Sirius took the chance to stretch out like a cat, a relaxed sigh escaping him as he felt everything slide back into place. Once he was done with this whole affair the first thing he was going to was take a hot shower.

Or turn the guards purple.

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Forty minutes later Sirius Black walked out of the Ministry of Magic a free man. With a wide grin on his face and his wand once again in his hand he was ready to take on the world.

He took a deep breath, enjoying the fresh air, and took a confident step forward.

"Sirius Black?" Sirius spun on his heel to see a plain man in a plain suit stalking towards him. He gripped his wand tightly, ready to take action if need. His innocence hadn't had time to be announced and the sight of him could trigger someone to attack.

"Who are you?" Sirius demanded.
The man smiled blandly. "My name's Phil Coulson. I'm here on behalf of SHIELD."
Sirius sat impatiently across from a beautiful with hair as red as Lily's and a man who had an honest to Merlin quiver of arrows. All he knew was that the man who had approached him outside the Ministry had told him he knew where Harry was and that Sirius had to come with him.

"Who are you?" He finally asked.

"Friends." The woman answered simply. 

Sirius snorted. "Friends know each other's names."

"Well, we know yours if that makes you feel better," The man smiled nicely. It made Sirius want to trust him and also punch him.

Sirius held back from attacking the man. "Where's Harry? He's the only reason I'm here and I want to know where he is!"

"Relax, Mr. Black-"

"Please call me Sirius, even though I'm not," Sirius smiled charmingly.

"Sirius, my name is Natasha Romanoff and this is my partner Clint Barton. In case you failed to notice we work for the organization SHIELD." Natasha began.

"What does this have to do with Harry!" Sirius yelled impatiently.

Natasha narrowed her eyes. "If you would refrain from interrupting you would know, now wouldn't you?" Sirius swallowed at the hard look in her eye and leaned back in his seat, telling himself to keep his cool until he found out where his godson was. "A little over three weeks ago our sensors picked up strange readings from a place named Godric’s Hollow. Once we tracked down the source we sent an agent to watch the location to gather information."

Sirius opened his mouth to say something but caught himself at the last minute. He hazarded a guess that whatever those 'sensors' picked up had to do with the attack.

Natasha hid a smile at seeing Sirius stop himself from speaking up. "The agent stationed at the house across the street, after watching for hours and recording all that he saw, his attention was caught by a
flash of light and the following cries of a child." Sirius' jaw clenched. "The agent found a young boy
in basket cradled in a tree, clearly distressed. The boy was able to tell the agent his name and that his
mother had 'gone to sleep'." Natasha stopped when Sirius let out a loud sob.

"Harry... he saw?" Sirius choked out. "He saw Lily die? He saw his own mother die?" Tears filled
his grey eyes and his hands clenched into fists at his side. He should have been there for Harry,
should have been able to leave revenge behind to comfort his godson. He didn't want to think about
what could have happened had Harry been found by someone else.

Neither Natasha or Clint said anything while Sirius cried to himself. They just sat patiently while the
man grieved for his friends and his godson. Eventually Sirius' tears tapered off and he straightened
his back.

"W-what was Harry doing in the tree?" Sirius asked once he had regained most of his composure.

Clint shrugged. "Not sure. The well wishers at Godric's Hollow appeared out of nowhere, could that
have something to do with it?"

"Harry was always popping up in one place or another. Used to scare the hell out of Lily when she
would set him down in his nursery and find him in the kitchen." Sirius gave a weak smile. "He might
have been trying to go back to his home and got a little off course. I'm not sure about the light,
though. Apparating can have a loud cracking sound but no light."

Natasha nodded at the explanation. "The agent brought Harry back to the SHIELD base to be
checked over and to find out who he was. A letter that had been placed in the basket gave us his
name and the name and address of his maternal aunt as well as giving a vague explanation about the
night that orphaned Harry." Sirius looked away. "We ran background checks on Petunia and Vernon
Dursley and when nothing untoward showed up we took Harry there to ask them if they were
willing to take him in."

Sirius snorted. "I can guess how well that went."

"I assume you've had the good pleasure of meeting Petunia Dursley?" Clint asked in amusement.

"Only once at a family dinner with Lily's parents. The shrew nearly deafened me when she saw me
turn into Padfoot when I was showing Rose and Dan. Stormed out the house like I had set her on
fire."

"Yes, well, she refused to even consider taking Harry in, as is her right, and signed over any
guardianship she may or may not have had, officially making Harry a ward of the state. At least on
the non-magical side." Natasha explained.

Sirius nodded. "I'm not sure about Lily's, but I know that I was named legal and magical guardian in
James' will, along with Alice Longbottom. In the wizarding world godparents are more than just a
formality, there's an actual familial bond between godparent and godchild, and by naming me Harry's
godfather and Alice his godmother we were automatically given rights to guardianship."

"So you have a legal right to Harry in the magical world and if the wills are written properly perhaps
even in the non-magical world." Clint said. He shared a look with Natasha, something that didn't go
unnoticed.

"What? What is it?" Sirius questioned.

"When the agent brought Harry back to base he disappeared and reappeared in my arms, calling me
his mother," Natasha started. "Not long after a golden light surrounded both he and I as well as
extending out to touch Clint and Coulson, the agent who brought you here. We didn't know what it was, still don't, but after two of our agents who were once part of your magical community took Harry to Gringotts to get the information we needed for his placement we discovered something.

"Natasha was listed as being the legal guardian of Harrison James Potter with you and Alice Longbottom as magical guardians." Clint finished.

Sirius let out a slow breath. He wasn't sure how that had happened or was even possible, though he would be looking into at a later time. He did know one thing. "You adopted him, didn't you?"

Natasha met his eyes steadily. "Yes."

Sirius closed his eyes and took several calming breaths. He hadn't expected this when he was brought here.

"His name was legally changed to Hadrian Clinton James Romanoff." Natasha added, making Sirius' eyes snap open.

"You kept his middle name? Why?"

"Hadrian will know about James and Lily Potter. He will know that he was born Harry Potter and all that that means. I won't hide his past from him, he deserves to know." Natasha said intensely.

"Thank you," Sirius said sincerely after a long moment. "Am I to assume that you've brought me here to allow me into Harry's life? Or are you telling me that he's your son now and want me to back off."

Natasha placed her hand on a folder that Sirius had failed to take notice of before and slid it across the table towards the wizard. He opened it, his jaw dropping in shock. It was a shared guardianship form from Gringotts and the Ministry of Magic. Natasha would be the legal guardian in both the non-magical and magical worlds while Sirius would keep his role as magical guardian and godfather.

"Really?" He rasped out, his throat tight.

"Seriously," Clint quipped.

Natasha stared at him impassively. "Once you sign this and get checked over for any effects from your relatively short stint in prison you will be able to see Hadrian."

"Man, I hope you sign it. Bright Eyes is going to need all the fun uncles he can get being raised by this chick," Clint jutted his thumb in Natasha's direction. She calmly reached over and bent it back, a clear threat, before letting it go. "See what I mean? And after all the trouble we went through to get you that trial and everything."

Sirius cracked a smile and was prepared to make a joke when Clint's words caught up to him. "Y-you got me a trial?"

"Well, yeah, dude, everyone in that weird little world of yours had written you off as the Dark Lord's Right Hand." Clint said casually, making Sirius choke on nothing.

"But how?" Sirius asked even as he reached for the ink pen on the table to sign the agreement. He was suddenly very thankful for Lily forcing those muggle lessons on him, James, and Peter. "And why?"

Natasha settled back in her chair at seeing Sirius sign it. "The why is simple. We needed to know
whether or not you were guilty. From we could gather beforehand we had our doubts but wanted to be sure. A trial while under the influence of a truth serum was the easiest way."

Sirius completed his signature with a flourish. "Right. If I was guilty then I just get chucked back in jail, if I was innocent then I still had claim to Harry. Only an actual conviction would have stripped me of my titles." Sirius added when Natasha tilted her head slightly and Clint looked openly confused. "But how did you make it happen? I tried begging for one but the guards just laughed at me."

"It was easier than you'd think." Clint said. "One of our agents, a first generation witch - a muggleborn - gave us a little insight. You're the Heir Apparent of one of the richest and most influential Houses in your society which even I know is a big deal. That you were just thrown into a maximum security prison without a trial or anything like that would cause a scare if it got out. We knew that money and blood talk in your world and you have both."

Natasha picked up where he left off. "All we needed was for that knowledge to be made public. A violation of a person's rights can cause panic. They start to worry about it happening to them, especially when it happened to someone with so much power. The public would start calling for the people in charge to fix it, to ease their fears."

Sirius' eyes widened. "And any Minister worth their hat would agree or else they get voted out of office. Damn."

"Yeah, yeah," Clint waved off dismissively. "So tell the truth. Can you really turn into a dog?"

- Remus Lupin sat on his pitiful bed in shock, staring at nothing. Sirius was innocent. He hadn't betrayed James and Lily. He hadn't led them to their deaths. He was innocent.

Remus couldn't believe that he had turned on one of his best friends so easily. He hadn't questioned anything about Halloween night or the night when Peter had supposedly been killed. He had been so willing to believe in the absolute worse in someone who had stood by his side for years.

He didn't understand how any of this could have happened. James and Lily were dead, Sirius was innocent, Peter was the traitor, Harry was gone. Remus was all alone. And he might not have been if he had just bothered to stick by Sirius or at least have enough courage to demand answers from him. Maybe if he had the truth would have been known sooner and he wouldn't be in such a state.

Sirius wouldn't want anything to do with him, Remus knew, and he had no one to blame but himself.

"Oi, Moony, open up! I know you're in there!"

Remus fell to the ground in surprise. He stared at the door in disbelief. He had to be hearing things. There was no way his once best friend was on the other side of that door.

"Sirius?"

"Who else would it be? Merlin?" Sirius mocked. Remus could hear the grin on Sirius' face. "Come on, Moony, open the door. We need to have a talk."

Remus closed his eyes. Sirius had come here to get revenge for Remus leaving him to rot in
Azkaban. He rose from the floor and slowly made his way to the door. He reached out with a shaking hand to released the chain before turning the knob. He jumped back out of the way when the door flew open, revealing a widely smiling Sirius looking just as he did the last time Remus saw him.

"Moony, old pal, nice of you to let me in." Sirius greeted as he stepped into the room. "Nice place," he added dryly as he looked around.

"It's all I can afford." Remus ducked his head in shame. He startled when Sirius clapped a hand on his back.

"Come on now, Moony, no need to get all embarrassed like you got caught in the broom closet with a Hufflepuff." Sirius teased. "Now pack your things, we have somewhere to be."

Remus choked on his saliva. "W-what? What are you talking about? Why are you even here?"

Sirius blinked in confusion. "Why wouldn't I be here?"

"Because I betrayed you!" Remus exploded. "I threw away ten years of friendship without question! I believed that you were just like your family! Once a Black, always a Black, right? I didn't stand by you when you needed it, when you had nothing else! How can you stand to be around me?" He finished brokenly, sinking to his knees as tears fell from his eyes. He tensed when he felt Sirius wrap his arms around him.

Sirius held his crying friend's head to his chest and ran a comforting hand through his hair. "You didn't do anything wrong, Moony. We all let the fear and worry get to us. We weren't sure who was a spy and who was loyal, including you. How could I hold you not believing in me against you when I didn't believe in you either?" Sirius huffed. "The only one we didn't think of was Peter."

Remus sniffed, raising a hand to wipe at his dribbling nose. "You don't hate me?"

"I can't hate you, Moony." Sirius promised sincerely. "James and Lily are gone, Alice and Frank are as good as, Peter is dead to me. You and the Prongslet are all I have left. I can't hate you."

With a broken sob Remus threw his arms around Sirius' waist, clutching him tightly. They held onto each other and cried. They cried until they were exhausted and could do nothing more than lean against the other for support. When their tears dried and their breathing evened out they finally pulled away from each other, giving one another one last squeeze as they did so.

Sirius wiped his face on the back of his arm. "Now, if we're done blubbering like little girls we need to get a move on."

"Where are we going?" Remus asked as he conjured a handkerchief to blow his nose.

"Notice anyone missing?" Sirius said with an exaggerated gesture around the room.

Remus was confused for a moment before his eyes widened. "You know where Harry is?" Sirius nodded. "How? Dumbledore said that he took him somewhere safe and that it would be best to keep the location a secret for his protection."

"What? Dumbledore doesn't have any reason to be deciding where Harry goes." Sirius shook his head. "Not that it matters. Harry apparently didn't like wherever the old coot left him and tried to go back home. He was found by some good people before anyone noticed."

Remus moved around the small room he rented, packing what few things he had in an old and worn out trunk. "Do you know where he tried to leave Harry then?"
"Yeah," Sirius snorted. "With Petunia and her lovely family."

Remus stopped short. "No.

"Yes."

"No!"

"Mhm," Sirius confirmed, rocking on his heels.

"What was he thinking? We all knew about the bad blood between Lily and her sister! She wouldn't even come to the wedding because she didn't want to be around a bunch of so-called freaks! And he was going to leave Harry with her?" Remus' eyes were round in shock.

Sirius grinned at his friend's response. "The people who found Harry went by their house and asked Petunia if she was okay with taking Harry in, instead of just leaving him on her doorstep." Sirius held up his hand when Remus opened his mouth to say something about that. "According to them she didn't want anything to do with him and signed over any rights she had in the muggle world."

"So these people - they've been taking of Harry?" Remus asked, choosing to focus on that point.

"They also were the ones behind my trial." Sirius added casually with grin.

Remus dropped the shirt he was folding, glaring at the other man when he picked it up and saw that it was covered in dirt from the floor. "Wha-?"

"I'll let them tell you about it. So pack up and let's go." Sirius threw his arms out, spun on his heel, and walked out of the room. He paused just outside the doorway and called back, "You have a wand, Moony, use it."

Remus glanced at his half packed trunk and cursed to himself. With a flick of his wand all of his things were packed neatly in his trunk. He shrunk it down and shoved it in his pocket before following after Sirius.

He caught up to the newly freed man outside the run down inn he had been staying.

"Where exactly are we going?"

"The people who found Prongslet have their own headquarters, believe it or not." That only raised more questions for Remus but Sirius continued on. "But first we're going to get you some new clothes. Can't have you embarrassing me in front of a beautiful woman."

Remus scowled at his friend. "And how exactly am I going to afford new clothes?"

Sirius turned to him, an exaggerated expression of shock on his face. "Isn't this why you made friends with the heirs of some of the richest families in the wizarding world?"

"You know that's not it, you prat," Remus pushed at Sirius who dodged out of the way with a bark of laughter.

"Well then I suppose that you deserve a gift for being such an upstanding person, not wanting to take advantage of your poor little rich friends." Sirius said solemnly. "A whole new wardrobe sounds about right to me. What do you think?"

"I think you have no concept of subtlety." Remus shook his head. While he hated it whenever his friends would try to buy him new things - he didn't want to them to see him as a charity case - he had
a feeling he wasn't going to be able to get out of it this time. And he really didn't want to make a bad impression on whoever had found and protected Harry.

He let out a resigned sigh, making Sirius grin triumphantly.

"So we'll stop by that muggle store you like so much and then go see the Prongslet after you get all dolled up." Sirius gestured wildly in his excitement, garnering attention from the people walking by them. Remus could only smile at his friend's antics.

Sirius held onto Remus' arm so they could Side-Apparate to the store Remus favored but could rarely afford - even taking into account the exchange rate between pounds and galleons.

The shopping trip didn't take as long as Remus had expected it would considering he was getting an entire wardrobe. He had already had a pretty good idea on what he wanted and knew where everything was. Sirius attempted to push a few ridiculous items on his friend, including a tight leather jacket and even tighter leather pants.

The clerk had tried to hide her giggles behind her hand when Remus attempted to smother his laughing mad friend with the jacket.

They managed to finish in just under an hour, walking out with several bags of the nicest clothes Remus had ever owned. They walked several feet away, turned down into an alley, and shrunk all their purchases before Sirius grabbed hold of Remus' arm and Side-Apparated away.

A stray cat startled at the cracking sound that echoed through the alley and hissed at empty air.

The two wizards appeared in a plain white room with a rectangular table and two chairs and nothing else.

"Where are we?" Remus asked.

"SHIELD temporary headquarters," Sirius shrugged. "They could probably explain it better."

"Who?"

Just as the word left the werewolf's mouth the door opened and a petite, beautiful woman with vibrant red hair and a fit and handsome man wearing sunglasses walked in, their footsteps not making a sound.

The man smiled disarmingly. "Remus Lupin, welcome to SHIELD."

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Tony Stark was focused on running an impossible amount of equations in his head, not noticing that he had stopped in the middle of the hallway. Lost in thought as he was - though he preferred to refer to it as 'lost in genius' - he didn't hear the sound the hurried footsteps or see a tiny blur of black and red barrel towards him.

He was only drawn out of his head when he was knocked to the ground when something soft and hard bowled his legs over.

"What the-" Tony's curse was caught off when his head hit the hard floor. A little dazed he lifted his head to see what had knocked him down. "A munchkin?"

"Not a munk-kin!" A little boy with wild black hair and startlingly clear green eyes sat on Tony's
legs. His forehead was red from where it had hit the man's knees and he was breathing heavily.

Tony groaned. "Didn't say you were. Said you were a munchkin. Big difference, Small Fry."

"Not a Small Fy!" The boy pouted.

"Look, kid, we can keep doing this until you learn to enunciate or you can get off of me," Tony quipped.

The boy scrambled up to his feet and waited until Tony got to his before introducing himself. "I'm Hadrian!"

"Tony Stark," Tony said absently.

Hadrian's eyes widened comically and he took a cautious step back. "Momma told 'bout you!" He accused. Then he tilted his head cutely. "Watta 'payboy?"

Tony narrowed his eyes. "Who's your mother, Rugrat?"

"Tasha Romanoff." Hadrian said brightly, smiling so widely his eyes squinted.

"The Black Widow is your mom?" Tony sputtered. He looked over the kid appraisingly, searching for similarities between the boy and the infamous woman. The only thing he could see that they had in common were their eyes - clear and bright green set against pale skin.

Hadrian bobbed his head, looking amused with Tony's reaction. "Uh huh."

"So if I were to, say, lock you in a closet she would more than likely hunt me down and remove my brain with a straw?"

"Like a Mummy! Ach!" Hadrian curled his fingers like claws and bared his tiny, slightly crooked teeth.

"Why do you know that?" Tony asked rhetorically. Of course the kid of the Black Widow would know about the process of mummifying someone. "What are you doing running around here anyway?"

Hadrian ducked his head in shame. "Made Gent Meanie go up an' up," he admitted softly.

Tony blinked before a sly grin broke out on his face. "You made a mean agent float into the air? How?" Tony figured the kid was a mutant or a meta-human, possibly even a product of unethical experiments - though that didn't seem as likely considering who his mother was.

"Magic," Hadrian answered happily.

"Magic doesn't exist, kid," Tony scoffed.

Hadrian glowered adorably - any effect it may have had ruined by his messy hair and the fact that his shirt had a cartoon lion on it. "Does too!"

"No, it doesn't," Tony gestured dismissively. "Magic is just science people don't understand."

"Nuh uh," Hadrian protested.

"Wonderfully put together argument, Houdini," Tony retorted.
"Dini was a fake!" Hadrian said.

Tony nodded. "Yes, he was. Just like all magicians and sorcerers and wizards."

"I'ma wiz!"

"Sure you are, Baby Oz," Tony rolled his eyes. "Look, kid, I have someplace to be which is... not here arguing with a three year old about magic."

Hadrian crossed his arms over his chest, pouting. "I'm four," he grumbled.

Tony didn't respond to that - just walked past the little boy, his hand reaching out to ruffle his hair. Hadrian scowled at the man's back and wiggled his nose around, like the pretty lady on the tv.

Tony could feel the burning gaze of the boy which he could admit was impressive for child. He was going to comment on, as was his nature, when his feet suddenly went from under him and he found himself hanging the air upside down. All the blood flowing down to his head gave him a head rush. He felt himself slowly turn in mid air until he was once again looking at Hadrian, who was grinning like a fox. Even upside down Tony could see the brat knew he had won.

"How'd you do it, kid?"

Hadrian pointed at his face and wiggled his nose.

Tony rolled his eyes, an experience he found odd when doing upside down. "Of course." He was silent for a moment, thinking something over. "So... what else can you do?"

With another wiggle of his nose and a giggle, Hadrian pointed at Tony's head. Tony bent his neck back to look at himself in the obnoxiously polished floor and could just make out the bright yellow where his dark hair should have been. He straightened his neck out and sent a dazzling smile at the giggling boy.

"You and I are going to have a lot of fun, Magic Man," -

Natasha found her son nearly three hours after he had made Agent Henderson float up to the ceiling for mocking Clint in Hadrian's range of hearing. She took one look at the scene, blinked once, and walked away without a word.

Hadrian - dressed in a child sized white lab coat with blue goggles tucked into his messier than usual hair - and Tony - wearing a matching get up as well as waving an over sized blow torch around - were left to cackle as a strange green goo spread across the floor.

Bruce Banner was just itching to get out of there.

He had been called in by SHIELD for a consult about a case involving gamma radiation - he was now the go to guy for when gamma experiments went wrong and he wasn't sure he liked it. No, in fact, he was sure he didn't.

Still he would do the job and get out of there as quickly as possible. No matter how many times they called him in and let him go afterwards without trouble he still had a hard time being in a government building full of people who would most likely rather him be locked up or working for them in
another sense.

Having already completed his diagnostic on the failed experiment of a scientist named Richard MacMillan, Bruce sat stiffly in the only chair closest to being comfortable, waiting for one of the agents to tell him his job was done and he was free to go.

He was glancing at the clock - again - when he heard the door slide open. His hope that someone was there to tell he was done was squashed when a small child walked in.

Then his brain caught up with the situation and he wondered why a small child had walked in.

The kid caught sight of him and waved. "Hi, misser!"

"Um, hello," Bruce gave an awkward wave. "What are you doing in here?"

"Lucking for a ban-ain." The boy held up his arm to show Bruce his scraped elbow. "Fall and go boom."

"You fell down and went boom?" Bruce repeated with a chuckle. The kid nodded. Maybe there was something to that saying about kids just being tiny drunk adults. "Well, I should have a band-aid in my bag," Bruce reached down for the satchel placed next to his feet. He rummaged around in it for a bit, promising himself to empty it out and organize it when he got home. He finally produced a slightly bent band-aid. "Can you put it on yourself or do you need me to do it."

"Me! Watch!" Bruce watched in shock as the boy wiggled his nose and the band-aid in his hand disappeared only to reappear on the boy's elbow, with the wrapping on the floor. "Did it!"

"You sure did."

The boy stepped closer to Bruce and held out his hand. "I'm Hadrian."

Bruce smiled and shook the small hand. "Bruce Banner."

"What you doin', 'Ruce?"

"Well, right now I'm waiting to go home. But I was brought in to consult on something I'm a considered expert in." Bruce winced slightly when he couldn't quite keep all the bitterness out of his voice.

Hadrian's eyes widened. "Wow... you mus' be suber duber smart!"

"Super," Bruce corrected absently.


"Exactly." Bruce smiled, a bit wistfully.

"Cool. Hey, Misser 'Ruce, what's your favorite color?"

Green flashed through Bruce's mind - followed quickly by purple for some reason. "Yellow," he said.

"Sunny Man!" Hadrian giggled. "I like green!"

"Oh, really?" Bruce's smile was tight.
"Uh huh," Hadrian bobbed his head. "'Cause of gwass and twees and my momma's eyes and Merlin! Oh, and that wizard Unca Clint found."

"You mean lizard?"

Hadrian shrugged. "I say what I say." He looked around the sterile room. "Can we make gummy drops? Ooh, or gummy worms!"

A chuckle left Bruce when he realized just why he had found those out of place ingredients in the supply cupboard. He had assumed they were hidden by a SHIELD scientist who had a sweet tooth or they were for some strange experiment that he wanted nothing to do with.

"I know how to make gummy elephants," Bruce offered.

"Elli-phants!"

"Hadrian, would you care to explain?" Natasha asked dryly.

Hadrian stared up at her innocently. "Misser 'Ruce and I are tea partyin'," he said and held up a plastic teacup half full of lukewarm tea. "It's yummy, Momma,"

Bruce Banner, a reputable scientist and dignified loner who normally sat hunched under the weight of his burden, adjusted the feather boa wrapped around his neck. "It's something I picked up in India."

"Misser 'Ruce, do elli-phants drink peanut tea?"

When Bruce started going into detail about the dietary habits of elephants Natasha made her escape.

- 

Mihka Iilethro was not considered a particularly intelligent or clever man - he was barely considered a man by most he had encountered. But even he knew when to cut his losses and take flight.

Unfortunately for him he had crossed paths with someone who was considered a particularly intelligent and clever man - who some would claim wasn't a man at all but rather a force of nature.

Mihka should have known better than to attempt to defeat the man known as wit in a game of cards but the witch he had spent the evening before with had ensured that the totem he now wore would bring him luck. Of course, this was the same witch whose true form was a hag - as it had been revealed the next morning to his surprise and disgust - and she hadn't clarified what sort of luck it would bring, only that it would.

None to mention that he chosen to test out his new totem against the man who laughed in the face of Bad Luck.

Mihka ran through the cluster of trees and shrubbery, ignoring the scratches he felt welting on his exposed face and arms. He wasn't sure where he was - didn't even know which realm he had landed in - but he wasn't going to risk stopping to gather his bearings.

He broke through the trees and found himself in a clearing of grass and white flowers.

So focused on his doomed escape Mihka failed to notice that he had stepped into a poorly hidden snare and soon found himself hanging upside down, his right hip dislocated and his head throbbing
from where it had bashed against the ground.

His vision blurred. When it cleared he found himself looking into startlingly familiar green eyes. Mihka attempted to back away in fear but could nothing in his current state.

The little boy standing in front of him wore a strange black shirt with green monstrosities wearing colored masks and slacks made from a material Mihka had never seen before - but all the hanging man could focus on was the black hair and greengreen green eyes staring at him curiously.

"Are you him?" Mihka asked hysterically.

"Huh?"

"Are you the Skywalker come to collect his due? I know you are," Mihka continued when the boy only continued to stare at him in befuddlement. "I would know those eyes anywhere. You are him and he is you and I am no better than dead."

"Lookie, misser," The boy put his hands on his hips and looked at Mihka with such impudence it made the man want to reach out and claw the expression from his face. "I dunno who are you so you dunno who am I too."

"Then who are you? Why have you strung me up like captured game?" Mihka's eyes widened. "Those eyes. You may not be him but you must be of him."

The boy rolled his eyes at the man's foolishness - which only served to heighten Mihka's fear. "You're silly. I don't like you,"

Mihka snorted. "Just like your damned father then."

The boy narrowed his eyes in suspicion. "How you know?"

"Your father is well known, young mischief maker. Man of magic far and practitioner of mischief wide." Mihka watched in faint amusement as the boy's eyes went wide with understanding. "What is your name, child sorceror," If possible the boy's eyes became even bigger.

The boy opened his mouth - whether to answer or spin a web Mihka did not know - there was a change in the air followed by an unnatural chill. Mihka stilled. His hunter was more than skilled enough to arrive without notice - he was making a show, just for Mihka.

He appeared behind the boy in the space of a blink, standing tall and imposing, the contrast between his regal attire and the commonness of the boy's clothing strange but not comical.

He raised a single finger to his lips, beckoning silence. Mihka made no sound despite how deeply he wished to scream.

"Close your eyes, young one. This is not for one such as you to witness." His voice was low and smooth, caressing the boy and calming him from the tenseness he had taken on when he noticed they were no longer alone - and turning Mihka's chilled blood cold. The boy followed his given instructions and shut his eyes tight, his small nose bunching up from the force of the action.

Mihka attempted to do as the boy did but was too late. The last thing he saw was his killer's manic grin and his greengreengreen eyes.

When Hadrian opened his eyes the weird man was no longer hanging from his trap. He looked around but could find no sign of him.
Turning to the even weirder man he asked, "Where he go?"

The man grinned. "Where vagrants such as him all go."

"Huh?"

"No matter. It is not for a mind so young to contemplate." The man said dismissively. "What brings you here, child?"

Hadrian gazed up at the tall man in curiosity. He probably should be more cautious about talking to a strange man he had never met before but in his experience they usually turned out to be the very best of uncles. And you can never have too many uncles.

Hadrian pointed behind him. "Flowas,"

"The flowers?" The man arched his eyebrow, making Hadrian giggle at the familiar action. "And what importance do these flowers have?"

"Lilies!" Hadrian threw his hands up in excitement. "Like my born momma!"

"Her name, I presume."

"Uh huh," Hadrian jammed his thumb in his chest. "I'm Hadrian!"

The man bent slightly at his waist and held a hand out. Hadrian placed his own small hand in the man's, gasping when it was gripped tightly and he was pulled closer to the stranger. The man brought up his other hand and with his pointer finger traced from Hadrian's thin wrist down his arm, up his neck, across his face until he landed on the years old scar that still looked recent. Hadrian shuddered when his scar was traced - three times, the man did it, staring at the damaged skin in fascination.

"Oh, what a sweet abomination you have, young Hadrian," the man said softly.

"W-what's a bomnastion?" Hadrian asked. "And what's your name, too, misser!"

The man grinned - all teeth and bad promises. "My name, child, is Loki."

When her son brought home another stray - one that apparently came attached with an overgrown puppy with command over the skies - Natasha sat him down and gave him a long talk about making friends with strange men who could appear out of nowhere or who were Tony Stark.

At the end of it Hadrian stared at her blankly before asking to go play with his new Uncle Thor.

Natasha resisted the urged to let her head fall against her desk only because she knew Clint was in the vents, laughing at her.

Chapter End Notes

P.S. - The Bruce segment wasn't my favorite but I figured since I had Tony and Loki I should add Bruce as well. I had considered doing a Thor one as well but it was basically
a two line section where Thor thinks Hadrian was Loki turned into a child. Which now that I think about is actually a good idea. (Maybe for a separate one shot fic?)
**Setting You Up (For A Happy Ending)**

Chapter Notes

Warnings : Unedited.

Note : For those that read the first Hadrian Romanoff I plan on bringing Steve in earlier. The arc I had planned for him last time didn't wanna cooperate with me so I'm scrapping it and doing something else. At the moment he's still frozen but it won't be long now.

Second Note : As well as (re)writing Hadrian Romanoff, I've also started working on a few other stories from my long list of ideas. I had planned to focus on them after finishing the original Hadrian Romanoff but we know how that worked out. So if I end up posting another story or more, don't worry, I'm not giving up on this one.

Last Note : Some chapters will be rewritten faster than others based on original length, whether I changed something in a previous chapter that warrants a change, and whether I've decided to add more scenes to expand the world a bit more. (Like I got requests for more about the New York Visit so I'll be adding more to that.)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sirius glanced curiously around the cluttered lab, trying to make sense of what he could see as Tony and Bruce lead him to the back of the room.

There was a tall metal archway attached to a round platform. It wasn't the strangest looking thing in the room nor the most advanced but Sirius had long learned not to underestimate something Tony built. The Great Toaster Incident made sure of that.

"What exactly do you need me for?"

"We want to study the effects and changes to a person's physiology when they go through transformations," Bruce explained. "We've been consulting with Dr. McCoy and Professor Xavier from the Xavier Institute as well as Dr. Richards..." Tony muttered something uncomplimentary under his breath. "But their research is based on the X gene and external forces that bring about the change."

"Not wizards like me," Sirius said with understanding.

Bruce nodded. "We're sure that there are differences between, say, a mutant with the ability to turn into an animal and a wizard who has to learn the process of turning into one, like you did."

Tony stepped away, calling out orders to JARVIS as he circled the machine. He removed a small panel to check on the wiring inside and stuck his arm under the arch to see if the sensors were working properly.

"Since we've already studied the magical 'core' as it is with you, Remus, and Hadrian we should be able to detect any changes or anomalies when you shift into Padfoot. I spoke to Remus and he agreed to have his next transformation monitored as well." Bruce said.

"You think you can help him?" Sirius asked intently, staring straight into Bruce's eyes.
Bruce looked away from the intense gaze and cleared his throat. "I'd like to try. The recent discovery of the Wolfsbane potion has helped but there's no telling what long term side effects there could be. If we have a better understanding of the process itself and what it does we should be able to come up with an alternative aid which effects we'll know about."

Sirius clapped his hands together. "Let's get this thing started then."

Tony and Bruce had Sirius under the arch for over an hour, asking him to shift as quickly or as slowly he could manage, requesting for him to perform different spells before shifting, seeing if he could perform magic in his shifted form. Tony was nearly mauled by the large black dog when he brought out a dog whistle to 'test how far the physiological changes went' - Bruce had to threaten putting a collar and leash on Tony for things to calm down again.

At one point Sirius sneezed just as he began to shift and ended up sporting dog ears and a tale. It took Bruce fifteen minutes to prevent Tony's death from an overdose of laughter and another ten minutes to pull Tony and Sirius apart when the billionaire told JARVIS to send the video to everyone in the tower.

"I'm working with children." Bruce removed his glasses and pinched the bridge of his nose.

"Doctor Banner, it seems we have an intruder," JARVIS said just as Bruce heard the sound of soft and quick footsteps.

He turned to see Hadrian running toward them, his arms stretched out in front of him. He ran to Bruce first and wrapped himself around the man's leg tightly.

"Unca 'Ruce!"

"Hadrian, what have I told you about running with your arms out like that?" Bruce reprimanded.

Hadrian blinked before responding in a soft voice. "Not to."

"And why is that?" Bruce continued.

"'Cause it makes me loppy." Hadrian answered, hiding his face in the fabric of Bruce's pants.

"The word is unbalanced." Bruce corrected. "How you got loppy from that I'll never understand." He pointedly ignored Sirius' sudden jaunty whistling.

"Whatcha doing, Unce 'Ruce?" Hadrian asked, happily changing the subject.

"Studying the differences between Sirius and Padfoot and the changes he goes through when he shifts." Bruce explained evenly as if he wasn't talking to a four (and three quarters!) year old. "We might even be able to extrapolate some data on the process of becoming an Animagus which we can use to help you if you decide you want to become one, too."

"Uh course I'm gonna be a Animag, Unca 'Ruce. Unca Padfoot says Daddy was one, too, and I wanna be like him. And he'll look down from Heaven and say 'wow, my son is sure a cute Animag' and Mommy will tell him to stop 'ragging about it to my grandmas and grandpas." Hadrian said fiercely. The dark haired boy didn't notice the effect his words were having on Sirius, who was staring at his godson with watery eyes and a proud smile.

"It's 'an Animagus', Hadrian." Bruce corrected. "But other than that, I'm sure you're right."

"Pup, when we're done I'll take you to get ice cream, promise." Sirius added after blinking away his
unshed tears.

"Oh, cool!" Before Bruce could stop him Hadrian ran to his godfather.

He went straight through the sensors, setting off alarms as well as sending new readings to Tony's computer. The different signals automatically separated into two categories - Black, Sirius and Unknown. Tony immediately set to working through it, typing in commands for the program before their data could be ruined.

Hadrian didn't notice any of it and jumped into Sirius' arms. Sirius caught out of reflex and held the boy to him.

"Hadrian! Come here!" Bruce stepped forward to pull Hadrian away before something could happen but Tony quickled moved in front of him, blocking him.

"Hold up there, Brucie. Something's up." Tony said seriously, turning to look strangely at Hadrian who was focused on naming all of the ice creams flavors he knew.

"What? What is it?" Bruce asked even as he moved to see what had caught his colleagues attention.

On the holographic screen were two readings, one for an adult male and the other for a small child. The outline of the adult was filled with purple, showing how Sirius' magic moved throughout his body - the scans read as normal.

The child's readings - colored green with much less data - were another thing entirely.

"Uh, guys?" Sirius called out anxiously when he saw the confusion and worry on the scientists' faces.

"Sirius, we need you to step out from the arch and leave Hadrian in there. We need a better reading of... whatever this is."

Sirius, though he desperately wanted to bury them in questions, did as he was told. He set Hadrian down, telling him that Bruce and Tony wanted to look at his magic too and to be still unless they said to move. Hadrian agreed easily and sat cross legged on the platform.

When Sirius walked over to them Tony silently pointing at Hadrian's scans. The small outline filled with moving green indicative of Hadrian's magic looked normal - except for the mass of pulsing dark purple and black centered in his head, splintering out all the way through his neck.

"Merlin," Sirius breathed. He knew it couldn't be a birth defect from either a bad combination of genes or from being exposed to dark magic while Lily was pregnant - Hadrian had been put under diagnostic spells both at St. Mungs and Gringotts - so it must have happened after he was born. He suddenly paled when he realized what he was looking at.

Bruce was almost too afraid to ask, "Sirius, do you know what that thing is?"

"If I had to guess, it would have to be connected to whatever Hadrian was attacked with that night. Look, the middle of it is right where Hadrian's scar would be." Tony's eyes never left the readings.

"Tony's right. Hadrian, well Harry, was scanned for any problems when he was born and he was perfectly healthy. If this is what I think it is, which would explain a lot actually, then we need to remove it from him as quickly as possible. It's not supposed to be done to a living thing, Merlin, it's not supposed to be done at all. Even dark wizards look down on it."
Bruce peered closely at Sirius' pale and stricken face. "What do you think it is?" Tony tears his eyes away from the readings to look at Sirius as well.

Sirius stared blankly at the readings. "Ever heard how murder kills the soul?" He started after a long moment of silence. Bruce and Tony nod, looking confused. "It's true. Murder committed in cold blood literally tears the soul. Thousands of years ago the Egyptians found a way to take advantage of it. The idea was to find a way to cheat death, to folly Anubis, Osiris, Nephthys, but they discovered that the price of challenging the balance of the world to be too high."

"What did they do?" Bruce asked in a whisper.

"They split their souls." Sirius said simply, his words heavy. "They willingly and knowingly tore their souls and ripped a part of it out of them, trapping it in an object of great meaning to them. The soul jar, the Horcrux, would tether their spirit to the land of the living and allowed them to return to a half life after they died. It kept them from truly dying but it also kept them from truly living. Whatever part of the soul was left in their body when they died moved on to the afterlife, leaving only the tainted one behind. Living with nothing but half of a tainted soul weakened them, magically, physically, spiritually, mentally. It broke their bodies and their minds."

Sirius took a deep breath. "Eventually the soul jars were all destroyed, the souls returned to their natural bodies, but they were cursed. They had tried to defy their gods and had to pay the price. No one is sure of what the price is, what punishment was handed down on them, only that the Egyptians forbade the practice. Not that it stopped the information from getting out."

A heavy silence filled the room at Sirius' words.

"Are you telling me that the dark wizard who tried to kill Hadrian left behind a piece of his soul?" Tony finally asked.

Sirius nodded. "It would explain much. Dumbledore was always sure that Voldemort was delving further into the Dark than anyone else and we all knew that he was obsessed with living forever. And as time went by in the war he went from being a supposedly charismatic and charming handsome man who worked from the shadows to a insane tyrant who only cared about raids and having everyone fear his name."

"Creating these soul jars would have made him insane, changing his tactics." Bruce realized.

"At the time we just thought he was mad at his slow progress but this makes more sense. I'm not sure why he would make Hadrian one or if he even meant to do so. Using a living person as a Horcrux comes with a risk of the person either being possessed or the person's own soul overtaking the splintered one and tearing it out."

"So Hadrian is either going to be alright or he's going to be possessed by a dead wizard?" Tony asked in disbelief.

"How do we get it out?" Bruce asked.

Sirius let out a strangled breath. "The only known way to release the trapped soul is to..." He trailed off, hanging his head, unable to finish.

"Is to what, Sirius?" Bruce pushed.

"The only way to release the soul is to destroy the vessel." Sirius finished hoarsely.

"What?" Tony's voice is sharp and dangerous and scared.
"Unca Siri, is it ice cream time yet?" Sirius' head snapped up at his godson's voice. Hadrian was still sitting innocently under the arch, completely unaware of the tension or the reason behind it.

Sirius shared a desperate with Bruce and Tony before walking over to Hadrian, a forced skip in his step. "Sure thing, Pup. Let's go get our coats and we can go."

"Yay!" Hadrian pushed himself up off the ground quickly and rushed out to grab his godfather's hand, smiling up at him. He didn't realize how close he was to breaking the man's heart. "Did Unca 'Ruce and Tony finish up?"

Tony plastered a large grin on his face. Bruce would later note that it looked remarkably similar to the one he wore during press conferences. "Yeah, kid. We got enough to play with for a while, but we want to do it again in a few days. That cool with you?"

Hadrian started to nod but then stopped himself. "Haveta ask Mommy. She said she'll be home tomorrow from the pizza place."

"You mean Italy?" Tony's smile turned a bit more real.

"Yeah, so gotta ask her. But not now, now's ice cream time." Hadrian said seriously, tugging at Sirius' arm to lead him out of the lab. Sirius sent a worried look back at the scientists before turning back to Hadrian, listening to him babble about something involving pepperoni.

Once he was sure the two were gone Bruce turned to Tony, panic in his light brown eyes. "What do we do?"

Tony's blue eyes glittered with determination. "We're going to do what I do best. If they say the only way to get rid of this thing is to destroy the vessel then we're just going to have to find another way. J, baby, you listening?"

"Always, Sir," Bruce was certain he heard the same determination in JARVIS' voice that he saw in Tony's eyes.

"Good. We'll start with the readings we have now - we can do a more in depth work up when Natashalie gets home. Hell, we might not even have to do anything. She'll probably just be able to glare the thing out of his head." Tony joked. "We can ask the good professor to do poke around a little, see what he can make of it."

Bruce rolled up his sleeve as he stepped up to the keyboard. "Sirius knew a lot about them so he probably learned it from his family since we know Hogwarts doesn't teach that sort of thing. His family library should help us."

"J, get in contact with Stephen and Wanda. We're going to need all magical hands on deck here."

"Certainly, Sir. And may I suggest bringing in him."

"If you have to send a memo to Richards. As idiotic as the guy is he might open up a portal on the little guy's forehead and banish the thing to another dimension." Tony continued as if he hadn't heard JARVIS speak.

"Tony," Bruce said warningly.

Tony sighed. "I know. We're going to have to bring him in. The brat's just a bit more important than a grudge."
"Just a bit," Bruce's lips twitched despite the situation.

"Alright. Next time we see Tropic Thunder we'll have him go fetch the Princess of Darkness." Tony waved his hand in annoyance.

"There will be no need to have my brother play messenger."

Tony stiffened.

Loki appeared out of nowhere mid step, a dangerous smirk on his face.

- 

Bruce sighed for what felt like the hundredth time. He was sitting next to Tony who was uncharacteristically silent, glaring at the man who was walking around the lab casually, examining the things that caught his eye.

After Loki's sudden appearance - something Bruce was sure wasn't a coincidence and made him even more paranoid about the god having eyes and ears everywhere - he hadn't said much more than that he was there to help, but only once they called for it.

While normally this would have meant Natasha had to ask for his assistance it was Loki they were dealing with Tony had to suck it up and ask.

Bruce was just about ready to kick Tony in the shin when the genius opened his mouth to speak - finally.

"Do you even know what you're looking at, Reindeer Games?" Bruce sighed, remembering that it was Tony Stark he was dealing with.

Loki glanced back at them, his eyebrow arched elegantly. "It's a particle beam weapon, specifically designed to target disrupt inorganic cells." He laughed at the expressions on Bruce and Tony's face. "You would do well to remember that in Asgard I am the equivalent to your station, Weaponsmith. I have studied your realm's socerery, your science, since its inception and discovery. Do not think so little of me."

"Are you going to help Little Merlin or what?" Tony demanded instead of pouting or pumping the god for information like Bruce knew he wanted to.

Loki tilted his head up, as if in thought. "Yes, I do believe I will." He didn't say anything more. Tony rolled his eyes.

Bruce's eyes widened in fear. "It's like dealing with a you who's lived for thousands of years," Bruce noted wryly.

Tony looked offended then considering, a sly grin sliding over his face at the thought.

"Hate to break it to you, Brucie, but he and I are not allowed to work together! Not in a lab, not in the kitchen, not at all!"

"That doesn't even make any sense!"

"Do I ever?"
"Surprisingly, yes. It's just that we don't know you're making sense until later." Bruce said.

Tony waved his hand dismissively. "What we need to focus on at the moment is finding another way - a safer way - to get that thing out of the kid's head. As fast as possible, too. Who knows what having someone else's soul trapped in your head will do?"

"I believe you're forgetting one thing, Stark." Loki said, his eyes on a prototype for a new arrow and his focus on the conversation.

Tony and Bruce winced, already knowing what the god was referring to - possibly the most dangerous part of the whole situation.

Loki turned to face them, a grin playing at his lips. "Who will have the honor of informing your woman warrior? The Murderess Natasha."

Natasha stared down the proclaimed god before her as if he didn't tower over her by at least a foot. Her cold and angered glare had long since cowed Bruce and Tony - who had shuffled off to the side under the pretense of going over the readings - but Loki was frustratingly unaffected.

"Explain."

Loki arched an elegant eyebrow, seemingly completely at ease with the whole situation. "And what do you wish for me to explain?"

"You can start with what you know," Natasha demanded, unimpressed with his stalling.

"I have long since known of the tainted presence embedded in young Hadrian's body." Loki said simply.

The table cracked under Natasha's fingers.

Loki simply glanced at the damage before dismissing it entirely. "Upon its discovery I delved into my studies, searching for answers. While your realm only found their uses in recent history," Tony's cheek itched at hearing something discovered thousands of years ago referred to as 'recent history'. "Others have not been so lax."

Natasha didn't say anything, only continued to glower at the man - though it softened minutely and her body lost just a bit of its tenseness. Loki didn't fall for the subtle lowering of her guard - something that both amused and irked her. Loki noticed this and sent her a small smirk.

"What do you know?" Natasha finally relented. She could have held out indefinitely except that it was her son at stake.

A contrite look flashed over Loki's face before disappearing. He sighed softly. "Through my texts I have learned the most common method of removing the soul shard from its vessel is - as your dog man said - to destroy the vessel." The reminder had Natasha repressing the urge to growl in frustration and anger. "Not accepting this I delved deeper into the works of the Forbidden and came out with the answer I was searching for. There will be no need to slay young Hadrian to rid him of the taint."

Natasha truly relaxed at that.

"The ritual itself may do it for us."
There was a loud crack. A piece of the table - already weakened from before - broke off in Natasha's deceptively small hands.

"Explain."

Loki sat silent for a moment, though whether to gather his thoughts or to irritate her she didn't know. "The ritual was founded by a race of Fae considered lost to war and time. As practitioners of White Magick, dissimilar to Light Magick despite what one may think, they sought to cleanse any Darkness they came across. When a traveling Necromancer used a young Fae from the village to house part of his severed soul, believing their calm temperment and peaceful living would mean no one would suspect what he had done, they learned of its ways." Loki explained. "The ritual they devised is quite simple, though simple does not always equate easy. It is a cleansing of the vessel's mind, body, and soul as dictated by the three elements of the Fae. 'By the sea, by the sky, by the earth, purify what is tainted, lighten what is darkened.'

"There is a risk, as I said. To have one's mind, body, and soul cleansed so wholly, to have all that is unpure purged from the body, is a dangerous endeavor for those of an unclear mind. Our saving grace, as you might refer to it as, is that Hadrian is young and untouched by the darkness through his own actions."

Tony stepped forward, unable to hold back. "So because whatever 'taint' the kid has going on isn't from anything he did himself he'll be safe?" Loki nodded, the simple action far too regal for Tony's taste.

"What does the cleansing ritual require?" JARVIS asked. A glance at one of the screens showed a blank memo list.

"Three elements split into seven. Odd over odd. A drop of sea, a part of sky, a piece of earth purified by that which is clean." Loki started. "Relatively easy to obtain. A flower grown by a child, water from a pond where lovers met for the first time."

"That shouldn't be too difficult," Bruce agreed.

"Yeah, but let's not take any chances." Tony added. "J, baby, why don't you run a nationwide search for those heartwarming stories people love so much. Try to focus on children and animals if possible, less of a chance of someone lying or having an ulterior motive."

Natasha looked at the men who didn't hesitate to help her son with gratitude, something they hadn't seen on her before. The moment ended quickly and she turned back to Loki. "What are the other four?"

"A drop of blood, a part of lightning, a piece of burial burned by that which is tainted."

Tony paused in his movements. "What does that even mean?"

"Worry not, Stark, I know where to find what is needed." Loki assured condescendingly.

"Of course you would, you -" Whatever Tony was going to say was cut off when Bruce put his hand over the billionaire's mouth. He didn't move it when Tony licked it, only stared at the man over his glasses in a manner reminiscent of a scolding teacher. Tony huffed, crossed his arms, and rolled his eyes.

Bruce grinned tiredly. "And the final requirement?"

Loki shifted in his seat - the first sign of discomfort he had shown. "A kiss of true love."
"He's four," Bruce deadpanned.

"You assume all love is romantic," Loki chastised. "Would a mother not lay down her life for her child? Would a brother not fight armies? Would a child not rebel to keep their sire safe? True love is as much part of the nature of man as hatred." He looked directly into Natasha's eyes when he spoke - startling green for startling green.

"Love is for children," she spat reflexively.

Loki let out a laugh - fake and mocking and harsh. "Do not think you can convince me your heart is so cold. You love your son, would turn against your team, your precious organization, and tear down armies if it meant keeping him from harm. You love your archer, would leave behind your petty attempts at atonement and snap the neck of those who would try to take away his freedom again, who would dare try to make less of what he has built. You love the man behind the armor, would remove even his red haired regent if she thought to hurt him. You love the beast and would take your child, your archer, your team, and disappear with him should he ask and should he not."

Bruce and Tony stared at the scene with wide eyes, unsure of what to do.

Loki leaned forward dangerously, his eyes glinting and his teeth sharp. He spoke quietly but no less intensely. "You proclaim love to be for children but you forget that to me you are nothing more than a child." He looked intently into her eyes for a moment more before leaning back, his point made.

Natasha didn't shift, didn't avert her gaze, didn't blink out of her turn. Loki merely raised an eyebrow.

"I want this done now. That thing is not going to be in my son for much longer." Natasha declared.

Loki's grin was victorious.

The ritual is ready. The stage is set. Begin.

Chapter End Notes

For some reason I forgot to update this site when I posted up to chapter six on FF... whoops?
Natasha easily side stepped out of the way of her hyperactive son.

Looking him over even as he raced around the room, Natasha could tell that Tony had been allowed to dress him - at least that's what the ACDC shirt and jeans with deliberate grease stains told her. Someone had tried to style Hadrian's hair but as usual it refused to be tamed and just stuck out in all directions.

"Hurry, Mommy! We got tos hurry!" Hadrian cried out. "Loki leave if we don'ts hurry!"

Natasha smiled softly. "Who told you that?"

"Unca Tony!"

"Well, I guess you better pick up the pace. I would hate it if we got left behind because of your short, little legs." Natasha teased, hiding a smile at the horrified look her son sent her before looking down at his legs.

"Hurry!" Hadrian yelled as he started running around the room aimlessly again, not doing much else except hurrying.

Natasha watched in amusement for several moments before turning on her heel to hunt down a certain genius.

Bruce was the first to notice it.

He figured that the others would have noticed it before him if it hadn't started off so inconspicuously. Hindsight showed that it was a little strange, but when it had been happening in real time it wasn't worth considering.

Bruce only noticed it after he tripped over it - literally.

Mjolnir was sitting innocently in front of the sink in the penthouse kitchen. Bruce had been going to wash his hands before making breakfast when his foot caught on the hammer and he fell harshly to the floor.

"Thor," Bruce muttered, shaking his head. He attempted to nudge the hammer out of the way before remembering just what he was dealing with and stood next to it while he washed his hands.
As he was drying his hands off, Hadrian came bounding in, his hands covered in a glittery purple sludge that Bruce was almost certain had once been regular Play-Doh.

"Hi, Unca 'Ruce," Hadrian greeted.

Bruce smiled and made to lift the boy up so he could reach the sink when Hadrian stepped on top of Mjolnir. Shocked at seeing the mighty and revered weapon being used as a foot stool, Bruce didn't say anything while Hadrian cleaned his hands then ran out of the kitchen, laughing happily.

"Thanks, Mimi!"

He didn't get a chance to think about it because not long after Hadrian ran from the kitchen, there was the sound of a chair exploding - something Bruce thought he shouldn't be able to identify by sound alone.

"Glitter!"

"Hadrian!"

The second time he noticed it, he wasn't the only one.

Hadrian was laying on his stomach with a coloring book open in front of him, crayons scattered around him. Bruce sat on the couch, reading, while Clint laid upside down on the armchair, tossing a tennis ball up in the air.

The microwave beeped, startling Clint enough that he missed and the tennis ball hit him square in the nose. Bruce didn't understand how the man who was considered the greatest marksman in the world always managed to get hit in the face when it came to simple things like that. He supposed it was how Tony was an absolute genius when it came to science and math but still had to ask JARVIS or Pepper how to spell 'necessary.'

Loki had taken to putting up teaching aides one might find in an elementary classroom in Tony's lab which could only be taken down by magic - unfortunately, Sirius and Remus thought it was too funny to help the inventor out.

Hadrian jumped up, exclaiming, "I'll get it!"

"It's not a doorbell, Bright Eyes," Clint remarked, rubbing at his sore nose.

"Spot check!" Hadrian shouted before rushing off to get his food.

Bruce rolled his eyes. There was no reason to claim a spot check when - Bruce cut off that line of thought when he noticed the put out expression on Clint's face. The archer was the type of person to take someone else's spot for no other reason than to be annoying.

It was only when Hadrian came back with a bowl of perfectly popped popcorn - no one was sure if it was magic or just Hadrian that allowed him to get every kernel cooked without burning anything - that Bruce noticed it.

On the floor where Hadrian had been laying sat Mjolnir.

"What?" Bruce glanced at Clint who looked as confused as Bruce felt. He was sure it hadn't been there before and Thor hadn't come through in the short time Hadrian was gone.

"Thanks, Mimi!" Hadrian chirped, drawing attention to himself. When Bruce and Clint looked back
Mjolnir was gone and Hadrian was settling himself back down.

Clint rubbed his eyes. "You saw that too, right?"

"I-I think so."

Hadrian glanced up at them, taking in their confusion, and giggled. "You're silly."

The third time Bruce was hard pressed to keep ignoring it - even if he wasn't awake to see it.

Hadrian was sitting on the couch in Tony's lab, playing Go! Fish with Dummy while Bruce and Tony worked. Dummy was completely trouncing the boy but Hadrian didn't seem to mind.

"Twos?" Hadrian asked.

Dummy beeped three times and whirled once.

"Aw, man," Hadrian pouted.

Tony glanced up from where he was working. "How is it that you can beat anybody at Blackjack but can't win against someone named 'Dummy' at Go! Fish?"

Hadrian shrugged.

"Didn't you name Dummy?" Bruce asked.

"Yeah, so?"

Bruce rolled his eyes. He made to say something but was interrupted when an explosion suddenly tore through the room. He was blown back against the wall, instantly knocked unconscious.

Tony managed to duck under the metal table to avoid the brunt of the explosion but his leg was imbedded by a jagged piece of sharpnel. He grit his teeth to keep from screaming out in pain. He squeezed his eyes shut in an attempt to get rid of the sting as the ringing in his ears faded.

His eyes slowly opened then widened when he saw Hadrian still sitting on the couch with Dummy standing protectively in front of him, a shimmering shield in front of them.

"Uncle Tony, you okay?"

Tony opened his mouth to reassure the boy when he noticed the ceiling above Hadrian's head had been damaged during the explosion and part of it was dangling precariously. With a creak it began to fall.

"Hadrian, move!" Tony attempted to run to the boy but his leg gave out from under him, sending him to the floor. He struggled to get up, watching with wide eyes as Hadrian didn't move out of the way. "Hadrian!"

Lightning struck and Hadrian was saved - a blur of silver and gold streaked through the air and knocked the fallen ceiling away from the boy, sending it to the other side of the room.

Hadrian cheered and Tony looked on, dumbstruck. He closed his eyes, counted to three, and reopened them.

Hadrian was still sitting on the couch, Dummy was still shielding Hadrian the best he could but now Mjolnir sat patiently next to the boy. Hadrian didn't seem surprised by the hammer and in fact
reached out to rub it sweetly.

"Thanks Mimi,"

A groan caught Tony's attention and he turned to see Bruce waking up.

"What happened?"

"Not sure. I'll have JARVIS go through the footage and run a diagnostic on any active projects."

Bruce nodded then winced at the pain the action brought. His eyes widened. "Hadrian?"

"He's fine. Little guy's got a guardian angel," Tony gestured weakly at the boy and the hammer, noting that while Bruce was surprised, he wasn't shocked. Tony shifted, hissing at the pain in his leg when he did so. "Need a little help here, doc,"

Bruce shakily got on his feet and stumbled over to Tony. Just as he started to tear Tony's pant leg to get a better look at the wound the doors to the lab slid open and Natasha, Clint, and Thor stalked into the room, ready for battle.

"Hadrian," Natasha breathed when she caught sight of her son, rushing to his side and checking him over for injuries. Clint did the same for Dummy.

Thor looked curiously at his hammer. "Mjolnir?" He questioned, reaching a hand out to feel for the hammer's response. His eyes widened before a bright smile broke out across his face.

"It seems that Mjolnir looks upon young Hadrian with favor and has made a vow of protection and fortitude." Thor revealed.

Clint and Tony balked while Bruce only shook his head in mild disbelief. Hadrian clapped happily and Natasha gave the hammer a small smile. She ran a finger along the handle.

"Thanks, Mimi,"

Mjolnir hummed.

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"Tony, I can't believe you did this." Clint said as they walked through the entrance of the amusement park, Hadrian high up on his shoulders and pointing everything that caught his eye.

Tony shrugged. "What can I say? I like the kid. It's not that big a deal."

"That's not what I meant," Clint started. Tony looked at him in confusion. "Why didn't you rent out an amusement park for my birthday?"

Hadrian started laughing even if he couldn't actually see the pout on his uncle's face.

-

"Tony, why is Hadrian in a bunny costume?"

Tony and Hadrian paused in their movements, turning slightly to look at the amused and annoyed Pepper Potts. "Would you believe me if I told you it was for science?"

"Not in the least," Pepper answered easily.
"In that case, we're trying to see if Hadrian can get JARVIS to answer without actually saying anything out loud." Tony explained with a sweeping gesture.

Pepper pinched the bridge of her nose. "That doesn't explain the bunny suit."

"Oh, well that's definitely for science." Tony answered. Next to him Hadrian nodded enthusiastically, the large, pink bunny ears on his head bobbing from the action. Pepper had to fight herself not to coo at the adorableness.

Instead she continued to stare them down, folding her arms across her chest.

"You look so pretty today, Auntie," Hadrian said sweetly. He held his arms out towards her, making grabbing motions with his hands. "Can I have a hug?"

Pepper was conflicted for a moment. She eventually gave in and moved toward Hadrian, embracing him tightly and picking him up. "Oh, you're getting so big. And don't think I won't be giving a certain trickster hell for teaching you to use your cuteness as a weapon," She added, but made no move to set him down.

"Okay, Auntie. I think Uncle Loki is afraid of you already, if that helps," Hadrian said as he wrapped his arms around Pepper's neck.

Tony stepped forward and gave Pepper a quick kiss on her cheek. "As he should be. Only a fool would go against the mighty and beautiful Lady Pepper,"

"Trying to butter me up, Tony?" Pepper teased.

"Just trying to distract until they're done." Tony said with a smirk.

Pepper's eyes narrowed. "Tony, what are you-" She was cut off when she was suddenly grabbed from behind and pulled back. Tony reached out quickly to catch Hadrian when Pepper let go of the boy in her surprise.

Moments later she was wearing a pink bunny costume, identical to the one Hadrian was wearing, and glaring hard at an entirely too innocent looking Sirius and Loki. When they saw that their puppy dog eyes aren't doing anything they quickly point at one another.

Pepper shook her head and turned to look at Hadrian who was having a hard time controlling his laughter. "You set me up, rascal," She accused, moving quickly and taking him in her arms. He didn't have a chance to struggle before she tossed him on the sofa and began to tickle his sides.

"Auntie! Auntie, st-stop! It was Uncle T-Tony's idea!" The boy confessed through his laughter.

"Oh, really?" She asked, letting Hadrian go. He took a few moments to catch his breath, a wide smile on his face.

"Uncle Tony?"

"Yeah, kid?"

"Run,"

"Yeah, good idea,"

Tony ran.
"Are you certain?"

"Yes."

Pepper nodded.

"Sirius, could you bring Hadrian here please?" Pepper called out from the couch where she was sitting next to a tense Natasha.

"No problem," Sirius answered.

He swaggered out of the kitchen with his godson on his back, both of them covered in flour and egg shells - neither of them seemed to have any actual eggs on them however. Remus trailed after them, completely clean and clearly trying not to laugh at them.

Sirius waved his wand in a familiar pattern and seconds later both he and Hadrian were spotless. The young boy thanked him, jumping down from his back, and moved to squeeze between Pepper and Natasha. "Yeah, Auntie?"

Pepper smiled, though the edges of her eyes were tight. "Hadrian, your mother's decided that you're old enough now to make this decision."

Hadrian looked between his aunt and his mother in confusion, his nose scrunching up. He reached out to grasp his mother's hand for comfort. Some of the tension left Natasha's shoulders.

"What is it, Momma?"

Sirius and Remus moved to sit together on the large armchair to the right of the couch, their attention on their godson and the women he was sitting between.

Natasha gazed down at her son intently. "Hadrian, do you want to go to Hogwarts when you turn eleven?"

Hadrian's eyes widened at the question.

"Are we even sure he's going to get a letter from Hogwarts? I thought they only had jurisdiction over the British Isles?" Pepper asked hesitantly.

"That is true but there have been cases where a child born on British soil moves away and still receives their Hogwarts letter. Since Hadrian was technically born in Britain his name would have been automatically added to the book of students." Remus answered.

"So," Sirius started. "What do you want, Pronglet?"
Hadrian sighed.

He had always known it was a possibility for him to go to Hogwarts but it had never seemed real before now. It was just something that was brought up and set aside every once and a while.

Now faced with a choice he wasn't sure what he wanted to do. He had gotten used to seeing his insane family everyday and didn't know how he would handle suddenly being on his own in a strange place surrounded by strange people.

He had just started fourth grade and if he decided to go to Hogwarts he would have almost six years worth of magical education over his year mates. It didn't take much for him to realize that that could cause problems, either by his own boredom or by confusion and resentment from others.

And he didn't know if he could leave his family, leave his mom, and go all the way to another country practically on his own.

Pepper wouldn't be there to teach him manners or how to deal with the press, or watch funny movies in pajamas with him. He wouldn't see Jane run into walls because she was lost in her thoughts or watch her drink circles around even the most coffee addicted of agents. Darcy wouldn't be there to ambush him with a funny hat or goofy shirt and take pictures of him - though that may not be much of a bad thing.

Living in a castle would mean no more sneaking into the lab and letting Tony use him as guinea pig while Bruce watched on in resigned amusement, no more Clint appearing out of nowhere to shoot net launching arrows at him then taking him out for churros.

Pranks wars with Remus and Sirius would be near impossible - they could probably sneak into the castle whenever they wanted but their brand of mischief wasn't exactly subtle. It would only be a matter of time before they got caught.

Thor wouldn't be there to regale him with stories of grand battles and the beauty of Asgard and Loki's many pranks. Loki himself wouldn't be there to give him lessons in seidr by turning Tony into a llama.

Being away from his mom would be the worst. He was already feeling off center just thinking about what it would be like to be separated from her for months on end. There would be no Russian lullabies that freaked out Clint or spars designed to teach him how to use his slight build to his advantage. There would be no making chocolate pancakes together in the middle of the night or watching her dance to music he couldn't hear. He wouldn't be there to crawl in bed next to her after she got back from a hard mission or to show her what he learned that day.

But he couldn't forget about the stories Remus and Sirius had told him throughout the years - about the exploits of the Marauders, the brilliance and snark and hidden mischievous of the professors, the no holds barred Quidditch matches, the awe inspiring castle itself.

It was where his parents met and fell in love, where Remus and Sirius and his father became friends.

He didn't want to leave everyone but he didn't want to regret not going either.

"One year," Hadrian finally said with finality. The others looked at him with knowing eyes. "I'll go for my first year and see how it goes. If I don't like it I won't get back."

Pepper pulled him into a tight hug.

"Are you sure?" Natasha asked intently.
Hadrian nodded. "Yeah, I'm sure, Momma."

Natasha ran a hand through her son's hair. "I'll ask you again when your letter comes to make sure but for now I'll take your word for it. But until then you're going to keep up with your school work and training."

"Of course, Momma." Hadrian agreed cheekily.

Remus smiled brightly, the expression taking the forced years off of his face. "Hogwarts won't know what hit it."

Hadrian wiggled out of his auntie's grasp and looked at everyone with large innocent eyes. "Do you think Uncle Loki could pretend to be Merlin?"

Minerva McGonagall hurried through the school, a sheet of parchment clutched tightly in her hand. She let out a sigh when she saw the entrance to the headmaster's office come into view. She made a note to herself that she needed to find a way to connect her Head of House office and the Deputy Head's office so she wouldn't have to make such a trip when she was in a rush.

"Gummy bears!" She didn't waste any time rolling her eyes at the ridiculous password. The gargoyle opened up to a spiraling staircase and Minerva quickly made her way up.

When she reached the door she didn't bother to knock or wait to be invited in, rushing right in. "Albus!"

"Yes, Minerva?" Albus Dumbledore said genially, his light blue eyes twinkling.

"He's not on the list!"

Albus blinked. "Excuse me?"

"Harry! He's not on the list of students!" Minerva exclaimed frantically. "I was reviewing how many incoming students we have to figure out the budget and his name wasn't on the list. I know I sent out his invitation but I can't remember if I received an acceptance."

"I'm sure it's just a mistake. Perhaps he was unsure of how to send his acceptance letter? We really should have taken into account that, although he is from a magical family, he was raised among muggles." Albus said reassuringly, laying his hands calmly on his desk.

Minerva breathed in deeply, her anxiousness and near panic fading away. Her heart had just about burst from her chest when realized that Harry Potter's name wasn't on her list and she had immediately thought the worse. The headmaster's words calmed her and she knew that he was right - Petunia Dursley, despite having a witch for a sister, wasn't well versed in the wizarding world and wouldn't know what to do. "Then an introduction visit needs to be scheduled for one of the members of the staff."

She secretly hoped that she would be chosen, wanting nothing more than to lay eyes on James and Lily's only child.

"I will make the trip myself." Albus announced to her shock.

"Albus, are you certain? You usually leave these trips to Pomona, Septima, Filius, or myself."
Albus smiled charmingly. "I am quite certain, my dear. It would do these old bones good to get out of the castle. And I admit to wanting to see the boy with my own eyes once again."

Minvera sighed in relief and mild disappointment. "Very well. I'll leave the matter in your hands."

She turned down his offer of a lemon drop and left soon after, not noticing the genial expression drop from the headmaster's face to replaced by an uncharacteristic scowl.

"Hadrian, chew with your mouth closed." Natasha ordered without looking toward her son. "You too, Darcy."

Both Hadrian and Darcy closed their mouths which were full of mashed pancakes and bacon. They had been trying to gross each other out by chewing obnoxiously and putting more food in their mouths even while they hadn't finished the earlier bites.

In unison, the two of them turned towards Natasha and stuck their tongues, not surprised in the least when she simply flipped them off in return.

"Momma, Auntie Darcy asked if we could go to a waterpark. Can we? I promise not to make people's trunks fall down this time." Hadrian pleaded, bringing out his best weapon.

Natasha resolutely refused to look towards her son and his bright, glittering green eyes and pouting lips. "No. There's no way I'm letting you and Darcy go to public area, by yourselves, where Darcy will be wearing a swim suit. That's a recipe for disaster and Darcy using you as shield against creeps."

Neither Hadrian nor Darcy could argue against that. Minutes after meeting Darcy had claimed the boy as her partner in crime, something that Hadrian happily went along with.

"What if Uncle Remus goes with us? Or Uncle Happy?" Hadrian asked hopefully. If she was objecting because of the mischief they would cause then Sirius, Tony, Clint, and Loki were out of the question for suitable chaperones.

Natasha thought it over for a moment. "If you can get one or both of them to agree, I'll allow. So long as you finish the package Coulson gave you."

At that Hadrian paused in his celebratory dancing and groaned loudly. "I hate those stupid packages! How come he's making me practice filling out paperwork?" He complained.

"Because he's decided to be proactive and make sure you have no excuse for not filling out the paperwork that you will surely cause when you get older." Pepper answered as she walked into the dining room, her heels clacking against the tile. Natasha nodded her agreement and smirked.

"So basically Uncle Tony's ruined it for the rest of us?" Hadrian's comment had Pepper rolling her eyes, but she didn't dispute it.

"And Clint." Darcy added around the strawberry in her mouth. "I heard that last week he actually hid in Maria's closet until Phil gave in and did the work for him."

Hadrian grabbed his own strawberry to copy Darcy. "That's because Agent Uncle has a fetish for paperwork."

Natasha silently reached over and cuffed the back of her son's head.
"It's true, though." Hadrian whined, rubbing the back of his head if out of principle.

"That may be true-" Whatever Pepper was going to say was interrupted when an arrow shot past her and embedded itself in the wall behind them. Nobody shrieked and jumped away, all of them having gotten used to Clint's antics. Pepper did glower in the direction she thought the arrow came from, though that may have had more to do with being interrupted.

"What's that?" Darcy pointed at the large envelope stuck to the wall by the arrow.

Natasha moved to get a closer look, her body tensing dangerously as she read. She ripped it from the arrow head and seemed to be fighting the urge to crumple it up and toss it in the trash. Instead she walked back to the table and handed it to her son.

Darcy and Pepper caught on fast, both of them looking at Natasha and Hadrian with soft expression.

Hadrian looked down at the partially torn envelope in his hands.

'Mr. H. Romanoff,'

East Facing Bedroom

Stark Tower

Manhattan, New York'
Everyone - Hadrian, Natasha, Clint, Sirius, Remus, Tony, Bruce, Pepper, Darcy, Loki, Thor, and Jane - were gathered together in Hadrian's room. Hadrian sat on the bed with his mom, Pepper, and Darcy while the others had to settle for the floor - except for Loki who had enough sense of mind to conjure a chair for himself.

Being passed around the room was his Hogwarts letter and supply list, slightly crinkled from being handled by so many people.

"This is it?" Jane asked in confusion. "I admit to not knowing much about magical schooling but this doesn't seem to be a lot. Especially the required items for Potions."

Sirius shifted. "The list is supposed to just have the basics but it barely covers that and for muggle raised it's even worse since they don't have the basics needed for the basics."

"And it's not that the muggle raised get a different list than others since they believe Hadrian to be muggleborn and I know that Lily had the same list that we did." Remus said. "Not only that but it looks like a few things have been taken off completely and weren't replaced by updated versions. We needed three more Potions books, ones that explained the different processes. Ingredient preparation, magical properties of the materials used, differences between stirring clockwise or counter clockwise, things like that."

"Yeah, but don't first generations over there get a visit from one of the teachers? Shouldn't they have asked about doing that with Hadrian?" Darcy questioned.

"Maybe, maybe not. It depends on whether or not they're aware of when magical schooling starts in America. Who knows?"

"What about Harry Potter's letter?" Bruce brought up.

"I'm not sure," Remus admitted. "Since Hadrian is technically still Harry Potter I had expected for him to receive two letters but Hogwarts might see it as them being the same person so only one was needed. Or a letter was sent to where Hadrian was last considered 'Harry' in a way. There's no way to know for sure unless we saw the Book of Students or talked to Professor McGonagall."

Natasha read over the list again despite having it memorized. "Are these books available here or will Hadrian need to go to Diagon Alley?"

"They should be. He'll still need to drop by Madam Malkin's to get the Hogwarts issued robes though." Sirius said.

"Aw, man, I'm gonna have to wear a uniform." Hadrian complained.
"You've known that for years, Champ. Suck it up." Hadrian stuck his tongue out at Tony in response.

"Enough about the boring stuff, what are we going to do for holiday breaks?" Darcy asked excitedly. "Because I already have the best idea for Halloween."

Hadrian paled.

"I'll need to know as well to plan accordingly." Pepper said.

"Well there's winter break in December to January. I'm not sure about the dates as they change sometimes." Sirius said.

Pepper nodded, jotting it down in a notepad that had appeared out of nowhere. Sirius checked her over for signs of a wand. "And what about school events and family days?"

"Oh, they don't have those."

"What."

Sirius grinned wryly. "You heard me right."

"So you're saying that a boarding school where children are away from home for months on end doesn't have planned visits or school events that families might attend?" Natasha asked, as close to disbelief as they had ever heard from her.

"Witches and wizards who went there don't even know that other schools do that so they don't think much of it. I didn't even know until Hadrian started school." Sirius explained. "The muggles might bring it up during the home visits but are told that they wouldn't be able to even see the school much less enter it."

"So we shall design our own events." Thor declared.

Pepper clicked her pen twice. "Exactly. Sirius and Remus know that school like the back of their hands and Loki should be able to work the wards or whatever so that everyone can enter the school - "

"We should visit the school before sending Hadrian off. Like a tour." Tony interrupted.

" - once a backdoor is created for us we can schedule family days." Pepper finished, nudging Darcy who reached over and smacked Tony's shoulder. "Thanksgiving and Halloween are a given. Birthdays, too."

While Pepper worked her magic Natasha turned to her son. "Since they don't send out progress reports or report cards I want you to keep a record of your grades and make your own. If you can, keep your graded work, too."

"Yes, Momma." Hadrian said obediently.

"If you need a copy of your practical grades you can go to the library and check out the Book of Records and sign your name. Madam Pince should let you as long you show you're respectful of her books and you tell her that you want to let your mother know about how well you're doing." Remus offered.

"So we've covered school supplies, wardrobe, holidays and family days, and grades." Jane counted
off on her fingers. "Anything else?"

"His other lessons and his training." Clint answered, picking at his nails.

Hadrian shifted on the bed. "Well, my music lessons should be easy or at least guitar and violin, especially if Uncle Tony figures out how to get his phones to work there."

"We could shrink a piano and send it with you but that'll be a lot more noticeable." Remus said.

"Unless he uses one of the empty classrooms. There're hundreds of them and not even the house elves check them all. He just needs to find one that looks like it hasn't been touched in years and clean it up." Sirius said before turning to look at Remus. "Which reminds me - we really need to start working on the second Marauder's Map."

"If he can use one of these classrooms then we can send him shrunken training equipment so he can at least keep up with his exercises." Natasha continued.

Hadrian was torn between hoping that he wouldn't be able to continue with his lessons so he could have more free time than normal and wanting to be able to continue with his lessons so he wouldn't have more time on his hands than he could handle. Hadrian's phone vibrated and he pulled it out of his pocket and read the text. "Agent Uncle says that he'll give me missions to complete in the school and that he'll send me the necessary paperwork to complete." Hadrian announced. "How does he do that?"

"Magic, sir." JARVIS sounded much too amused for an AI.

"Is anyone else afraid of the fact that Coulson and JARVIS are best friends?" Clint asked in a stage whisper.

Everyone - barring Loki and Natasha - raised their hands.

"I find their alliance quite amusing," Loki said with a grin.

"Oh, that makes me feel better."

- 

Hadrian watched in amusement as Tony directed everyone around - reminding them of what they were doing that day and where they needed to go and what they needed to do and basically being very redundant.

When Sirius started following Tony around, shadowing his movements and mouthing everything Tony said, Hadrian nearly doubled over in laughter.

"Hadrian, do you have your phone?" Hadrian looked up to see Coulson standing in front of him, smiling genially.

"Yeah, right here." Hadrian put his hand on his jacket pocket to show where he meant.

Coulson nodded. "Spider Bites?"

Hadrian pulled his sleeves up to show matching wristbands with metallic spiders on them. "Fully charged."

"Good job, kid." Coulson reached over and ruffled Hadrian's already unruly hair, earning himself a powerful glare from the boy's mom. "Gotta go make sure Happy has the right directions."
Hadrian snorted, not believing the excuse at all. His mom was oddly obsessive over the state of his hair. It drove him mad and Sirius to giggles.

"Come over here, Houdini." Tony called from near the elevator where he was standing with Bruce and Clint.

The green eyed boy rolled his eyes, but stood up and walked over to where his uncles were.

"Yeah?"

Tony spared him a glance before his attention went back to attaching something to Clint's collar. "While the hooligans are checking out Alfea we'll be getting your school supplies."

"Yes, Uncle Pepper, I know."

Tony ignored that. "Your mother has decided she doesn't want to risk you falling too behind your work in case you decide to leave after your first year so we'll be getting the supplies for your old school as well and Agent is going to send you some of the class work and tests. You going to be able to keep up with all of that?"

"I've dealt with Norse gods, a man who can turn into a raging giant, a billionaire genius who flies around in modern day armor, the best assassins in the world, and a coffee deprived Nick Fury and Pepper Potts - at the same time. I think I can deal with some extra homework."

Tony ruffled Hadrian's hair much like Coulson did and pretended not to notice the glare he was getting from Natasha. That woman had a sixth sense about her son's hair - it was disconcerting. "Way to go, Jeromino."

Clint rolled his eyes at the rhyme.

"You know you could've told me this before."

"True, but I wanted to make sure you really want to go to Pig Pimple before I said anything."

"You got that one from Uncle Clint." Hadrian accused. Clint held his hand up for a high five at that.

Tony shrugged. "Potato, french fries. Either way, no nephew of mine is going to go through life not knowing how to do all your work while simultaneously not doing it or how to hot wire a car."

"Mom taught me how to hot wire a car when I was six." Hadrian declared. Clint started making warning gestures at the boy.

Tony eyed him suspiciously. "With what car?"

Hadrian's eyes widened. "Coming, Mom!"

As Hadrian, Natasha, and Tony made their way through the throng of people, they did their best to look out for the entrance Remus had described. They would need Hadrian to open it for them, but the wizard had assured them that once they got through it would be easy.

Remus had explained that outside of the British Isles, it was much more common in magical communities to integrate with nonmagical culture. The degree of the integration depended on the location, but on average the general population of them knew how to work a phone or knew what a television was.
Part of it stemmed from other countries either not having a magical history that went back for thousands of years or not holding on to traditions so much that they began stagnating - Remus had said that another reason was that magical Britain had a tendency to offend everyone, even their allies.

"Xenophobia runs as deep as blood purity in some circles," the werewolf had explained. "And believe it or not it tends to crop up more among the equalists."

Tony was the one to spot the entrance. He caught their attention and pointed at an out of place bright red door that no one else seemed to notice. As the trio walked closer to it, Natasha felt the familiar buzz that she had come to associate with magic. A look at her son told her he felt it too.

"You remember what to do, Lokison?" Tony asked when they stopped just next to the door.

Hadrian rolled his eyes at the name while Natasha glowered at the genius.

"Yes, Uncle Tony, I'm not an idiot." Hadrian chastised. "Two knocks on the right, one in the middle for each person." Hadrian explained even as he did just that. He kept the beats between knocks consistent each time.

After the the third repetition, Hadrian's small hand reached forward, going straight through the door. No one other than the three of them seemed to take notice.

"Open sesame." The boy grinned back at his mother and uncle before walking confidently through the door.

Natasha, ignoring Tony's muttering about magical dramatics, walked through as well, hiding a small gasp at the feeling of the wards recognizing her. A few seconds later she heard Tony do the same.

In front of her Hadrian was staring at everything in slack jawed awe. Spread out in front of them was paved street of flattened stones. On either side, not quite uniform buildings stood proudly, their signs lit brightly and catching the attention of whoever walked past, advertising clothes and shoes and the newest in flavor in candy. Farther down the street, placed between an ice cream shop and shoe store was a marble fountain with the bluest of water Hadrian had ever seen spouting from it and catching the light. Little kids ran around it, splashing each other and throwing small coins in to make wishes.

Unlike how Remus and Sirius described Diagon Alley, it wasn't all cramped together with people in robes bustling about. Nonmagical fashion seemed to be more accepted as Natasha counted more jeans and hoodies than robes and cloaks. The stores all seemed to share magical and normal items in equal measure; she thought she heard someone talk about checking out the movie center as they walked by. In the window of a few buildings she noticed sale promotion for school supplies.

And throughout it all was the buzz and hum of magic filled the air, giving the whole thing a heightened feel to it. She wondered if it always felt like this or if the awe faded after time.

Tony had taken charge and led them to the first store that caught his attention.

- Which turned out to be the magical equivalent of an electronics store. Natasha and Hadrian shared an exasperated look at that.

"So they haven't quite managed to find a way to make cell phones or laptops and the like work around areas of concentrated magic, like magical households or magic schools or this place, but they do have other things that do some of the same things." Tony explained to them after he finally let the poor shop assistant go after interrogating him.
The genius picked up two rectangular mirrors the length of his hand and gave one to Hadrian. "They use these instead of video calling. You key the other mirrors you want to be able to call into each one, like a contact list, and then just say the name you have it listed under. You can put a password on it like on a phone or use your magical signature. These two have already been keyed to each other for demonstration. Say Demo-Mirror One." He told Hadrian.

Hadrian did as instructed and watched in fascination as the surface of the mirror he was holding shimmered and vibrated softly, reminding him of a dialing phone. Tony's mirror started to vibrate much more harshly and the man showed how the screen displayed who was calling, 'Demo-Mirror Two' flashing in and out.

"Accept." Tony said clearly. His image appeared on Hadrian's mirror in perfect clarity.

Hadrian tilted the mirror to show his mom. "Cool. It shows up better than on my phone."

"Well, if you stopped getting syrup on everything..." Natasha trailed off with a smirk. Hadrian stuck his tongue out at her to which she responded by tugging on his ear just had enough to earn her a scowl. Then she stuck her own tongue out.

Tony ignored them. "They have journals that you write in and whatever you write shows up in the other one, like emailing or texting. Apparently you have to be careful to make sure you write in the recipient or you could end up messaging everyone your journal is keyed to. They don't vibrate like the mirrors, but they either heat up or glow for a few seconds."

"They don't have something that lets you video call and text?" Hadrian asked, handing his mom the mirror and walking over to a shelf to pick up a journal. He turned it over in his hands as he inspected it.

"Not that I could find out." Tony answered, apparently having had the same thought as the boy. "And with the mirrors if you miss a call, there's no voicemail or missed call notification like with a phone. I'm thinking of bulk ordering them to mess around with in the lab."

"With Loki?" Natasha questioned. She moved to stand by Hadrian, not wanting to be too far from him in an unknown environment.

Tony grinned. "And Puppy Chow. Wanna have these bad boys upgraded in time for Hadrian to take a few with him to school." He explained.

"I thought you were trying to figure out how to make actual electronics work at Hogwarts?" Hadrian pointed out, absentmindedly tracing the ridges of the spine of the journal in his hand.

"Still working out the kinks and I don't want you to be three weeks in and they start spazzing out. It's better to work with a working template and go from there. With my genius, Siri's understanding of earth magic, and Loki's, well, Loki, we should be able to send you off with a magic phone and tablet.

"Of course, I'll have to find a way to make them send calls and messages to our regular phones so we don't have to carry around more than necessary. I doubt I could get Pepper to agree to carry around a mirror to board meetings, unless they have compact mirrors. No, that would be too weird. But it could work for Natasha's undercover work..." Tony's voice trailed off as he turned to track down the shop assistant. The young man noticed and went pale.

Hadrian turned to his mom, not looking surprised at the turn of events. "Wanna go get my supplies and check out the other stores while he goes mad scientist on that guy?"
"I'd thought you never ask." Natasha smirked.

- 

Tony caught up with them when they were nearly done, carrying his own bags that had been expanded and lightened with charms which were nevertheless still full to the brim.

Hadrian was holding the bags that held his Hogwarts supplies barring the cauldron and telescope. Sirius had a stockpile of cauldrons at home that he could choose from and he planned on using the star gazer Thor had gotten him for his birthday.

Natasha had his supplies for R. J. Downey Elementary School, a study planner that would make Pepper proud, and a book she had found that explained the differences between the American Magical Community and the British 'Wizarding World' - something none of them necessarily needed but could come in handy if he seemed to know too much for a foreigner.

All he had left to get was his wardrobe - and possibly an owl, cat, or toad - and his wand.

"Hey, Uncle Tony!" Hadrian greeted happily.

Tony made to reach over and ruffle Harry's unruly hair, but the several bags in his hands prevented him. "Hey, Lil' Strange. Quick question, you think I could upload JARVIS into these handy little mirrors?" He shook the bags for emphasis.

"If anyone could, you could, Uncle Tony." Hadrian praised before taking on a thoughtful expression. "Of course, that's only if JARVIS agrees. I don't think he would set himself up for Man in the Mirror jokes." The green eyed boy added with a grin.

"We already know who the fairest in the land is." Tony preened at his own compliment.

Hadrian giggled at the display of mostly mock narcissism. "Yeah, just don't let Uncle Loki hear you say that. He might think you were interested in more than his magic."

Natasha sent the man a vicious smirk and Tony looked at his nephew with a combination of disgust and betrayal, the man's blue eyes wide and expressive. Hadrian was having none of it and instead pointed out that they were at the wand shop.

"I wonder if my wand will be more like mum's or dad's." Hadrian wondered as they walked into the shop, a tinkling sound announcing their arrival.

The other shoppers glanced at them, but none of their gazes lingered long. Though one woman did have to elbow her girlfriend to get her to tear her gaze away from Natasha.

"Someone'll be right with you, if you'd like to look around a bit." A worker called out when she noticed their arrival.

The other shoppers glanced at them, but none of their gazes lingered long. Though one woman did have to elbow her girlfriend to get her to tear her gaze away from Natasha.

"Someone'll be right with you, if you'd like to look around a bit." A worker called out when she noticed their arrival.

Tony and Natasha nodded at her and ushered Hadrian to look at the wands on the shelves lining the walls.

Natasha sent her son an odd look, Tony too busy searching for an unsuspecting employee to notice.

Hadrian was nearly touching them with his nose with how close he was looking at the wands. He occasionally reached out as if to pick one up, but always stopped short with a small shake of his head.
"Hadrian, what are you doing?" Natasha asked after he did it for the seventh time.

Hadrian once again pulled his hand back before actually picking the wand up, this one made of oak and was about ten inches long. "Uncle Loki said that when he started searching for a suitable staff to focus his magic, he had to see what his magic was compatible with because if he got one made out of something that didn't react well with his magic, it wouldn't work well for him and might even backfire if he tried to cast a spell with it."

Natasha nodded in understanding. "And none of these feel right?"

Hadrian shook his head. "The holly ones sort of do. And the ones with phoenix feather or dragon tooth cores." Hadrian pointed at a nine inch brown wand with a thick handle. "That one's holly with phoenix feather so I thought it might work, but it made my hand feel fuzzy when I reached for it."

Natasha sensed someone walk up behind them, a quick glance at Hadrian showing her he noticed it as well.

"You seem to know your stuff, young man." Hadrian and Natasha turned as one, Hadrian with an almost bashful smile and Natasha looking ever the curious mother, to see a man in his late twenties with dark blond hair and a strong jaw smiling at them.

"Thanks," Hadrian said. "My uncle taught me some things about it."

The man - whose name badge said his name was Kellan and that he was a wandmaker - nodded. "Well, your uncle taught you well. Wizards and witches are drawn to different sorts of wands based on what they're made of. Not to say just any wand with the right parts works for them. Just because someone is drawn to oak and unicorn hair doesn't mean that any wand with those two will be the right match."

Chuckling at the slightly dazed look in the boy's eyes, Kellan asked Hadrian, "Now, son, what all is your magic drawn to? It'll help narrow the search."

Hadrian turned back the shelf and ran his hand over all the different wands, hovering just an inch over them. He turned back to answer Kellan. "Holly or acacia for wood. Phoenix feather, dragon tooth, or hippocriff feather for the core."

"A protector are you?" Kellan asked, his eyes lighting up. "Your name, sir?"

A faint blush appeared on Hadrian's cheeks as his mom and uncle looked at him with teasing and knowing smiles. "Hadrian. And I guess."

Kellan chuckled. "Well, let's get started, why don't we?"

After the third failed attempt, Natasha managed to foster Tony off to another worker so the genius wouldn't distract Kellan with his barrage of questions about wandmaking. Hadrian sent her a relieved smile. As much as he loved his Uncle Tony and the man's eccentricities, it was nerve wracking enough finding the perfect wand without someone constantly asking questions.

"Let's see here," Kellan muttered mostly to himself as he picked up a wand from the lowest shelf. "Winter holly, dragon tooth burned in dragon flame, ten and a half inches."

Hadrian immediately knew that this was his wand. Without even reaching his hand out he could feel the almost sentient magic coming from it, calling to his own magic and settling it. Hadrian held his hand out slowly, as if he was afraid that the wand would reject him. To his surprise and Kellan's, the wand flew out of the wandmaker's hand and into Hadrian's open one. Green and gold lights
exploded from the end of the wand and showered Hadrian.

Kellan was looking at him in awed shock, as were the other customers and workers. "I've never seen a wand actually fly into its owner's hand. There have been incidents where one will glow or call out, if you will, when they feel their match near, but never has one done something like this."

Natasha stepped forward and put a comforting hand on her son's shoulder when she noticed how uncomfortable he was at the all the curious stares he was getting. There wasn't any need for her son to be in the spotlight.

"Do you know if it means anything?" She asked after glaring the spectators who suddenly found other things much more fascinating.

"The cases in which a wand calls out for its match usually mean that the wizard or witch has a higher magical reserve or the potential to go above and beyond the expected of them in terms of magical power or ability. In this case, I would take it to mean that your son's wand was making sure that Hadrian got matched correctly and wouldn't allow the boy to settle for less." Kellan looked thoughtful. "With the uncommon specifics of the wand core and wood, I can only assume that while Hadrian's magic is compatible with holly and dragon tooth, any regular old pairing of the two wouldn't be enough.

"Winter holly, as you can guess, is holly gathered in winter. But the special thing about this particular wand is that the wood was harvested from a branch frozen over in the middle of summer. Even now we don't know exactly what caused that one particular tree to be experiencing a different season than its brothers."

Natasha noticed that people were starting to stare again as they tried to listen in. She guided Hadrian and herself a few steps closer to Kellan. "What about the core?"

"Dragon flame has extreme magical properties, all of which I can't even recall at the moment. The dragon tooth in your son's wand was burned with the dragon flame of the dragon's mother, an act that has been recorded to happen among certain breeds of dragons. It's considered an act of protection and guardianship, as dragon teeth are notoriously hard to burn or crush, they can only really be sawed, so for a mother to be able to successfully burn their hatchling's teeth is a sign of power and warns predators off, as young dragons are vulnerable during any periods of growth such as having their first teeth fall out."

Hadrian had pushed himself flush against his mother in embarrassment. He didn't expect to be chosen by such a special wand, all he wanted was to get his school supplies. And maybe convince Uncle Tony to eat something that'd turn him purple.

He groaned when he thought about the others' reaction to this. There was no way Remus and Loki were going to leave him be until they figured out all they could.

"You don't do things by half, do ya, Houdini?" Tony broke through his thoughts.

"Shut up and pay for my son's wand." Natasha ordered, causing Hadrian to smirk and Tony to sputter.

"What? Why?" The man asked even as he reached into his pocket.

"Because I know somehow you caused this. If I had brought Bruce or Remus, my son wouldn't have been pulled into the spotlight." Natasha said.

Tony rolled his eyes but didn't object.
"Can we go get ice cream?" Hadrian with an innocent expression.

Natasha smirked and Tony groaned. He was so going to be purple.

"I look like an idiot," Hadrian complained.

"You look adorable." Darcy countered.

"That's worse!" The green eyed boy tugged at his black t-shirt with a cartoon lion, eagle, snake, and badger on it. Whenever he was near a source of magic - like a charmed object or another wizard - the animals would be animated. The snake and the lion would get into a cartoonishly violent battle - the snake somehow managing to use brass knuckles and a mallet - the eagle would put on large glasses and a tweed jacket before writing something on a blackboard that appeared out of nowhere, and the badger would curl up with a cinnamon bun and nibble on it lazily.

It was a cute shirt - when he was five.

"Relax, Ri-Ri, they're just going to think you're really excited about going to school."

"Oh, so now I'm a nerd?"

"What's wrong with being a nerd?" Bruce asked, hiding his smile behind his coffee mug.

"Nothing - when I don't have to wear this shirt!"

"Aw, Hadrian, you look adorable," Jane cooed as she walked into the room not noticing the smug grin Darcy sent the boy.

Hadrian crossed his arms over his chest and pouted. "Where are Uncle Sirius and Uncle Remus?" He asked, changing the subject.

"Putting on their disguises." Bruce answered. "They don't want to risk using glamours in case they have to go into Gringotts or someone recognizes the magic."

"They need to hurry up. The sooner we leave the sooner we get back and I can take this stupid shirt off."

Sirius chose that moment to saunter into the room. His tousled black curls were covered by a wig of cropped light brown hair and his Black inherited grey eyes were hidden behind hazel contacts. His past pale skin had long since given way to a natural tan that someone had applied make up to his nose to make it look a bit wider than normal and his cheekbones had lost some of their aristocratic sharpness. Remus followed in after his friend with a grin. His greying hair had actually been dyed a soft auburn color and his distinctive amber eyes were now a soft blue, similar to the color his eyes had been before he had been bitten. Combined with the fact that he no longer shrank in on himself out of shame he was practically unrecognizable by sight alone by those that knew them all those years ago.

"Wow, Uncle Remus, you look nice." Hadrian complimented, pointedly ignoring Sirius who pouted.

"Thank you, Hadrian," Remus smiled, also ignoring Sirius. "Are you ready to go?"

"Been waiting for you," Hadrian said tightly.

Sirius laughed and threw his arm around his godson's shoulders. "Don't worry too much about it,
Prongslet. We have plenty of time to get your uniform."

"Yeah," Hadrian glanced down at his shirt. "That's what I'm worried about."

Remus shook his head in amusement then reached into his pants pocket to pull out a disk covered in a thick cloth. He carefully unwrapped it, showing it to be a Frisbee sized and shaped disk with 'Registered International Portkey' etched into it, and held it out to his friend and godson who reached out to grasp it tightly with one hand each.

"We'll be back in a few hours." Remus said to Bruce, Darcy, and Jane.

"Bring me back a gift!" Darcy said while Bruce and Jane waved at the trio of wizards. Hadrian stuck his tongue out at the young woman.

"Alright then. Hold on," Remus said as he turned back to the portkey. "Portkey activate - Leviosa."

They disappeared in flash and shot.

And reappeared in the designated arrival point in Diagon Alley. Remus and Sirius quickly pulled Hadrian out of the way so that no one could land on them. Remus re-wrapped the portkey and slipped it into his pocket before turning to Hadrian.

"First we'll go to Madam Malkin's for your fitting and then we can drop by the pet shops so you can look around." Remus said as he led Hadrian to the main part of the alley.

"Whoa," Hadrian breathed as he looked around. Something about the old fashioned majesty of the Alley made him smile and want to laugh. It was all close together and similar and so filled with magic that it made the hairs on his arm stick up. If he could feel it - feel how deep rooted the magic was in the stones and wood, how old it was, how comforting it was - then he couldn't imagine what his godfathers felt. "This... is... awesome!"

Remus chuckled. "Yeah, it is, isn't it?"

"Madam Malkin's is just up ahead," Sirius said. "We should be in and out in about ten or fifteen minutes. Then we can look around and pick up your wardrobe on the way out."

"Allons-y!" Hadrian shouted, drawing odd looks to himself. Remus shook his head and led his godson in the direction of the robe shop.

Inside Madam Malkin's was only one other customer, a young blonde girl with snow day rosy cheeks, and her mother. Hadrian was quickly ushered up onto the other stool and a seamstress set to taking his measurements.

"I like your shirt," the blonde girl said shyly.

Hadrian glanced down at his shirt even though he knew exactly which one he was wearing. "It was a gift from my d-godfather but you can have it if you want."

"Oi!"

"Sorry, Uncle Siri," Hadrian said, not at all apologetically. He turned back to the girl. "I'm Hadrian Romanoff. I would shake your hand but..." he trailed off with a gesture at the aging seamstress measuring his knee caps.

"Hannah Abbot."
"Are you a first year, too?" Hadrian asked politely. Hannah nodded, her pigtails flying. They chatted easily while the seamstresses worked, talking about what house they were most likely to be sorted in, what rumors they had heard about the castle, who else was going to be students there. It was all very easy and soothed Hadrian's nerves about not being able to connect with anyone at Hogwarts. Hannah didn't even ask why an American kid was going to Hogwarts, too excited about seeing her best friend Susan through the shop window when Mrs. Abbot brought it up.

Hannah was finished first, the seamstress attending to her telling her that her order would be ready within an hour or so. The blonde and her mother left, saying goodbye to Hadrian, Remus, and Sirius.

"Look at you, making friends already," Sirius teased. "And with such a cute little girl. You do take after me after all."

"I'm telling Mom you're trying to set up her only son with a girl she hasn't met," Hadrian said archly, sharing a grin with his seamstress when Sirius lost a bit of his color and failed to come up with a response.

"I'll get my revenge in about three years when Natasha scares off any girl or boy he's interested in," Sirius muttered darkly under his breath. Remus' acute hearing picked it up and while he gave his friend a side eyed look he didn't say anything - it was the truth after all.

Natasha was already doing it to Spiderman and they didn't even know the kid's real name.

Not long after the seamstress, whose name they learned was Frederica, announced that they were done for the moment and that Hadrian's school clothes would be ready for pick up in the next hour or so.

Outside the shop Remus put his hand on Hadrian's shoulder and steered him towards Tolly, Olly, and Cal's Toad, Owl, and Cat Shop, passing by Eeylops Owl Emporium. There didn't seem to be any need for Hadrian to get an owl when he had his mirror and could use the magical postal service to send letters to any friends he made.

Just as they passed by the store a loud screech was heard and a white blur shot out from the door. "Damn owl!"

Hadrian noticed the blur make a sharp turn in the air, coming directly towards him. He crouched down, crossing his arms over his head for protection, and waited for the pain of talons digging into his skin that never came. Slowly he moved his arms away and looked up.

A lovely snow white owl with slivers of silver-grey hovered in mid air just above him, her golden eyes peering imperiously down at him. When Hadrian straightened out fully the owl took her place on his shoulder and nipped at his ear.

"Ow! What're you trying to do, pierce my ear?" Hadrian grumbled, rubbing his sore ear.

The owl hooted at him, almost as if she was laughing at him.

"Oh, laugh it up - why am I talking to an owl? Ow!" The owl had nipped his ear again as if in reprimand.

Sirius was hanging on to Remus as he laughed loudly and unapologetically, tears in his eyes and his stomach cramping from how hard he was laughing. Remus wasn't doing much better but he had the decency to not point at his godson and call him owl whipped - whatever that meant.
"I hate you all," Hadrian deadpanned. "Ow! Would you stop that? You're worse than my mom!"

The owl had the gall to puff her chest out in pride.

Remus took a deep, stuttering breath to try to control his laughter. "Looks like she's taken a liking to you. Guess we don't need to look for another pet for you." The owl pinned him with a glare. Remus put his hands up in surrender. "Hey, I'm on your side."

He blinked. "I'm talking to a bloody owl."

The shop keeper stormed out of the store, a large gilded cage filled with owl treats, feeder mice, and a book on owl care in his skinny arms. He dropped the cage at Hadrian's feet then pointed at the owl. "You can keep that beast, no charge!" With that he stalked back into the store, muttering to himself and leaving a confused crowd in his wake.

Hadrian turned his head to look into the owl's eyes. "I guess you're coming home with me then?"

She trilled and patted his head with her wing.

Chapter End Notes

P.S. - Maybe Hedwig loves Harry/Hadrian so much because his hair looks like a nest to her.
Minerva McGonagall looked across the Great Hall, checking that everything was in place for the arrival of the students, and sighed.

After the panic and worry of discovering Harry Potter hadn't been added to the list of incoming first year students she had gone through all her records and found that she had indeed sent out a letter and that it had been marked as 'incapable' which meant that the boy was either behind wards so strong they kept out Hogwarts letters or he was no longer eligible to attend, either through death or lack of magic. She had fretted that those horrid Dursleys had done something to the boy but Albus had taken her aside and admitted that he had certain artifacts that proved Harry still lived.

The following days after the discovery had been filled with anxious nerves until Albus announced that everything was well in hand. Trusting that the headmaster had visited Privet Drive and sorted it all out Minerva had gone back to arranging everything for the upcoming school year. It was quite easy between so many years of practice and the number of first years being quite small.

Briefly her thoughts strayed to hoping that another magical baby boom was approaching. It was quite disconcerting to see more and more rooms go unneeded, collecting dust, because there simply weren't enough students to justify their use.

She shook her head. The time for those thoughts would come later, over a glass of that lovely brandy Filius hoarded.

For now she had to focus on ensuring the elves were able to perfectly time the arrival of food with Albus' rather eccentric welcoming speech and that Hagrid knew how many first years they were expecting - the disaster of Rhosyn Cooper being left behind on the other side of the lake was not one Minerva wished to repeat.

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Natasha trailed behind her nervously excited son with a small smile on her face.

A large crowd of families bustled around them - parents ushering their young children about, older students doing their best not to look like they were close to their families, new to the scene non-magicals looking hopelessly lost.

Clint walked by her side, his peering gaze hidden behind sunglasses and his hands shoved into the pockets of his jeans, looking every bit like a normal man who couldn't kill half the people around them in three minutes or less.

Thor and Loki walked behind her like sentries, easily looking over the rest of the crowd due to their impressive height. A sneer marred Loki's handsome face and several times Thor had to reach over to
pull down Loki's hand when someone bumped into the god in their haste. Though it would be amusing to see Thor figured it would be best if his brother didn't turn someone into a caterpillar for the offense.

Tony and Sirius had disappeared into the crowd almost the moment they arrived, Bruce and Remus hurrying after them like parents keeping an eye on their trouble making sons. Sirius and Remus had opted to wear their disguises again while Tony hid his oddly recognizable but not familiar face behind the most expensive pair of sunglasses he could find. Bruce had argued that his beard was one of his most famed features but Tony refused to shave it - citing something about blasphemy and being true to one's self.

Natasha kept her ears open for the sound of scandalized screams and shouts of 'you bastards!' in case she needed to step in or, more likely, watch the show.

Hadrian led them to the impressive glaringly red train, weaving through the crowd easily due to his size and training, careful not to get too far ahead the others lost sight of him.

Once they had broken free from the sea of nervous energy Hadrian pulled out his shrunken things from the pocket of his hoodie, handing it to Loki for show. The sorcerer unshrunk the trunk and owl cage with a flick of his finger, Hedwig soaring in seemingly out of nowhere to land on Hadrian's shoulder, greeting her boy with a nip at his ear.

"Hey, girl," Hadrian reached into her cage to pick out a treat for her, tossing it up in the ear to let her catch it.

Thor offered to put his trunk and Hedwig's cage away before the dam broke and all the students were hustling to do so as well. He dragged Loki along with him, a warning in his eyes when he noticed the familiar smirk on his brother's face.

"I'll go see if anyone has a clue about where Harry Potter is," Clint said with a wink at Hadrian before disappearing into the crowd.

Hedwig nipped at Hadrian's ear again before taking off.

Hadrian rolled his eyes. "They could be less subtle about it, you know."

"About what?" Natasha asked airily.

Hadrian raised his eyebrow. "Leaving the two of us alone to talk about our feelings since it'll be the first time we'll really be apart. It's gonna suck." He admitted.

"It was your choice to come here." Natasha reminded him, even as she knelt down in front of him and pulled him a closer to her to look him in his eyes.

"I know," he muttered. "But it's still gonna suck not seeing you guys until Christmas. What am I gonna do on Halloween?"

Natasha ran a hand through his hair, somehow not managing to muss it up even more. "You're going to mirror call your uncles and listen to them babble something or other about your aunt and uncle, then you're going to light a candle each in their honor before getting your butt down to that feast and enjoying it like a regular boy." She all but ordered, a teasing glint in her eyes.

"I'm not a regular boy, though." Hadrian almost whined.

"That's right," Natasha indulged, a smirk appearing on her face. "You're my boy."
"Ew, Mom, we're not in a live action Disney movie." Hadrian groaned.

Natasha rolled her eyes and kissed his forehead where his scar once sat.

Hadrian did whine at that, telling her she was embarrassing him.

"I could always call Thor over and have him-

"No, no, no! This is fine. You can kiss my forehead all you want!" Hadrian interrupted her frantically.

Thor would manage to attract the attention of everyone at the station with his loudness, brashness, and sheer presence. Hadrian would prefer to wait until he at least got onto the train before making any kind of name for himself, 'that kid with the weirdo uncle' not being one of them.

They heard a few chuckles from the parents closest to the pair that heard Hadrian's plea. One mother turned to her daughter and said that if that's what it took for her to agree to being kissed goodbye, she would gladly call over someone named Armstrong. The girl, who was Hadrian's age, sent him a glare for that.

"Inspiring the masses already, young Hadrian?" Loki's velvet voice caused several people to flush and titter.

"Guess those world domination lessons paid off, huh, Silvertongue?" Hadrian teased back.

"I'm sure they did," Loki drawled. "It is unfortunate that you will soon learn that the world already belongs to someone."

"Who?" Hadrian challenged, knowing exactly where this was going.

There was an amused light in Loki's own green eyes. "Me."

Without warning he shot forward and went straight for where he knew Hadrian was the most ticklish. Soon the air was filled with the dark haired boy's delighted laughter.

"I-I give! U-uncle!" Hadrian managed through his braying.

"Yes, I am your uncle." Loki said, deliberately misinterpreting what Hadrian said.

"T-tap out!"

"If you would please release my son, he does have a train to catch." Natasha stepped in.

Loki let Hadrian go only for the boy to be picked up from behind by familiar hands. "Would you look at that, Remy? Gone for a second and they decide to have all the fun without me."

Remus grinned from next to his best friend. "Well, how could they have all the fun when you're Sirius?"

Sirius beamed proudly.

"What's with all the manhandling?" Hadrian complained with a smile on his face.

"Is it manhandling? From what I recall, you're only eleven, not really a man..." Sirius trailed off with a smirk.
Hadrian huffed. "Would you rather I say 'boy-handling'? 'Cause that sounds weird and illegal."

With a flick of his wand, Remus checked the time. "Hate to say it, but it's almost time for Hadrian to board the train." That statement brought down the mood a bit.

"Do you have everything you need?" Natasha asked Hadrian who was still in Sirius' arms

Hadrian pulled out the checklist Agent Uncle had forced on him and nodded.

"Your books?"

"All Dewey Decimal-ed."

"Your potions kit?"

"Covered in bubble wrap."

"Your school clothes? And regular clothes?"

"Auntie Darcy helped me with that wardrobe system."

"Pens and paper? Quills and parchment?"

"In the office compartment."

"Shoes?"

"Wearing my school shoes, the others are with my clothes."

"Mirrors?"

"One in my pocket, the back ups in my trunk."

"Spider Bites?"

"Uncle Tony made one for every outfit I have."

Natasha turned to look at Tony, who only shrugged, unrepentant at the information. "I also color coded them."

Hadrian wriggled out his godfather's grip and walked up to his mom. He took her misleading small hands in his, looking up at her in earnest. "Mom, I have everything I need and want with me. And if I don't, you can just send them by owl. I'll write home almost every night, do my homework, and still help Uncle Siri and Auntie Maria set Bruce and Remus up." The two subdued men pinked at that while Sirius grinned wolfishly. "I'm gonna be okay. Going to Hogwarts isn't anything compared to living with all of you."

Natasha pulled him into a tight hug, burying her face in his thick hair. "You will be okay." She ordered quietly as they pulled apart.

He sent her a cheeky smile. "Of course I will. I was raised by the best."

"Brat." She said affectionately. "Say goodbye to your uncles."

Tony pulled him into a tight hug first, slipping a watch that would act like an alarm clock once he put his schedule in into his hand.
"Well, really it's from me and the Department. It's powered by runes similar to the ones they use in magical stop watches with a few tweaks here and there. Make sure you write up a review on it, Houdini."

"Of course, Uncle Tony." Hadrian rolled his eyes, though he was thankful for the gift.

Thor gave him a dream stone that was supposed to help with his homesickness.

Hadrian was pulled up into Thor's bone crushing grasp next. "I find myself already missing your presence, son of Natasha."

"I'm gonna miss you, too, Thundercat." Hadrian promised as he was set down.

"My gift to you, young Hadrian," Thor pulled a beautiful smooth stone the color of a rainbow at sunset. "A dream stone gifted to me by my own mother. It will bring you peacefulness in sleep."

Hadrian cradled the stone in his hands, marveling at how it caught the light and seemed to glow. He nodded thankfully and carefully placed it in one of the many pockets of his messenger bag. He hugged Thor one last time before stepping over to Bruce and Remus.

Sirius positioned himself between the two, a grand smile on his face.

"I, the ever magnificent Padfoot," Sirius announced, careful not to speak to loud so as to draw unwanted attention to himself. "Do present thee, Legacy of the Marauders, with a legacy of the Marauders."

Hadrian gaped, looking between Sirius, Remus, and Bruce. They all just grinned at him.

"No way,"

"Yes way," Bruce said as Sirius reached into his coat pocket and pulled out a large manila envelope with a wax seal of the Avengers logo. Hadrian's name was written in lovely calligraphy across it, something he knew had been Sirius' handy work.

Sirius handed it reverently to his godson before placing his hands on the boy's shoulders. "I solemnly swear I am up to no good - ack!"

Hadrian had jumped on his godfather, squeezing him tightly as he babbled his thank yous. His short arms reached out and pulled Bruce and Remus in as well. "You guys are so awesome! How did you even manage to do this?"

"For the most part it was just something we did from memory," Remus started to explain.

"And all we really needed was a few, uh, unauthorized trips to Hogwarts to make sure the map was right and update anything we needed to." Sirius finished.

"Loki helped, too." Bruce said. "He added something to it so that no one who hasn't been given permission by its creators or its owner, you, can see what it shows, even if they do have the password."

Hadrian finally let go of his uncles, still beaming.

"At the moment you'll be greeted by Padfoot, Moony, Prongs, and the Avengers. It's up to you to add anyone else you trust with the knowledge of the map." Remus added.

"You guys are the best!" Hadrian proclaimed.
"You sure about that, Bright Eyes?" Clint slipped a small bottle of liquor into Hadrian's hand that Natasha immediately removed and replaced with a small wooden box that had the Black Widow insignia etched into it as well as a leather necklace with an arrowhead attached to it that was Clint's actual present.

"Don't worry, I snuck one into your trunk earlier." Clint stage whispered.

"Love you guys," Hadrian said, getting the sentiment returned by all his uncles, Thor's proclamation being the loudest.

Natasha scoffed, mostly for show. "Love is for children."

"Good thing I'm only eleven, huh, Mom?" Hadrian took the cuff on the back of his head for the remark with grace.

With one last kiss to his forehead and a soft smile, Natasha ushered her son onto the train.

"Bye, Mom."

"Goodbye, Hadrian."

Hadrian paused just inside the train, fighting the urge to run back out for one last hug. He clutched the strap of his bag so tightly his knuckles turned white.

"Mischief managed."
Hadrian adjusted the strap of his bag as he gathered his nerve.

The first few compartments he had passed already had students in them, mostly older ones that had reserved their seats for friends. When he had peeked in he had noticed some of them checking out his forehead, mostly out of curiosity since they didn't seem to disappointed at the lack scar visible underneath his wild hair.

He finally found an empty one not too far from the front and sat down. The seat wasn't too comfortable, though he could probably fall asleep on it if he wanted. He could have done without all the bright red though. It was like staring at the Iron Man suit for hours on end.

Hadrian took off his messenger bag and pulled out the box his mother had given him. He opened it, not surprised to see that it had another box inside of it, this one a smooth black with a combination lock. Hadrian entered his mom's actual birth year and the box clicked open to reveal a stack of photos.

They were all from the dance class Hadrian had tried out when he was younger and talked his mom into joining him. Hadrian found that ballet definitely wasn't for him, but had continued on for several lessons just to see his mom dance. The look on her face as she twirled around had been something Hadrian wanted her to do again and again.

Smiling softly, Hadrian put the pictures back in and closed both boxes, putting them back in his bag. He rummaged through it for a bit, ignoring the other gifts as he could check them out that night in his dorm, though he did slip on the necklace from Clint.

Agent Uncle wouldn't let him leave unless he had packed his bag to his specifications, leaving Hadrian with enough food and water rations, currency, and concealable weapons to last two months on the run.

Hadrian had just opened a chocolate chip granola bar when the door slid open to reveal a short girl with light brown hair done up in two braids and thin eyebrows. She didn't have any colored trim or tie yet so she was a first year like him.

"Oh, hi," She sounded surprised, like she hadn't expected to find any one in the compartment. She relaxed a little when she noticed that he wasn't an older year and probably wouldn't kick her out. "Do you mind if I sit with you?"

Hadrian shrugged. "Not at all. Want a granola?" He offered, holding his up for show.

Her brow furrowed in confusion as she took a seat across from him. "What's granola?"

"A snack bar. They're usually really healthy, with nuts and berries, but I have some with chocolate and marshmallows if that's what you like." Hadrian explained. He pulled out an unopened bar and showed it to her.
She took it from his hand as she sat down across from him and read the ingredients written on the shiny wrapping. Hadrian was glad his aunties liked the all natural ones as he really didn't want to get into a discussion about preservatives and whatnot.

"Do you have any with raspberries? They're my favorite." She finally asked, a note of curiosity in her tone.

Hadrian nodded and rooted through his stash looking for one, tossing it to her and catching the one she threw back at him. He watched her out of the corner of his eye while he shoved his snacks back in as she opened it and took a bite.

"This is really good. A bit chewy, though. I don't suppose you have some water on you, too? The trolley lady doesn't sell drinks."

Hadrian smiled and opened his bag again. "I have juice and water. I had my uncle put a few cooling charms on them."

"Apple juice?"

"Coming right up." Hadrian reached in his bag, noting that the girl's eyebrows rose at how far his arm went in but she didn't seem too surprised, and pulled out a juice box. She thanked him and took it from his hand.

"I'm Lisa Turpin." She had pinked when she realized that she was taking food and drink from someone and she hadn't even introduced herself.

Hadrian held out his hand. "Hadrian Romanoff."

"You're from the States?" Lisa inquired as she took his hand and shook it. "How come you're going to Hogwarts? Did you move here before you got your letter from an American school?"

"No, I was already attending a magical elementary school along with my tutoring. But my mom gave birth to me in London and my name was entered into the Hogwarts registry. I got my letter in America and my mom said if I wanted, I could come." Hadrian explained, making sure to make it sound as close to the truth as possible. None of what he had said was an out and out lie but it wasn't necessarily the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth either.

"That's amazing. I don't think my mom and dad would let me go to a boarding school in another continent." Lisa sounded impressed.

"Two of my uncles have places here so she could be closer by if she needs to." Hadrian shrugged it off.

Lisa looked thoughtful. "What's 'elementary' school?"

"Primary school." Hadrian answered before realizing she probably didn't know what that was either. Hogwarts was the only school witches and wizards attended in the British Isles and those born in the magical community never knew anything different unless they made friends with someone raised in the nonmagical world. "They're schools for younger kids, usually starting when they're about five years old, that teaches the basics of each subject so when they get to higher grades they have a better understanding."

"Higher grades?" Lisa asked.

"Oh, grades are the equivalent of years. Like, a twelfth grader in America is the same as a seventh
year at Hogwarts."

Lisa nodded her head in understanding before tilting her head. "Why do you need more years to learn the subjects? There isn't that many according to my parents and my big sister."

"Oh, I forgot that Hogwarts offers less classes than the schools in America." Hadrian said honestly. Despite preparing himself for the culture shock he was about to go through he still used to his usual schooling. "A lot of magical schools in America also teach nonmagical classes so that the students aren't stuck with having to stay in the magical community because they don't have a 'normal' education." Hadrian explained the best he could.

"Plus, a lot of families in America want their kids to go to the same school if they're close in age and this way if a wizard has a sister who can't do magic, they can still go to the same school. She just doesn't take any classes where you do magic."

Lisa's hazel eyes had widened and lit up and she was leaning forward eagerly. "What classes do you have? I know Hogwarts teaches Transfiguration, Potions, Charms, History, Defense Against the Dark Arts, and Herbology from the first year and on and they have Arithmancy, Ancient Runes, Muggle Studies, Divination, and Care of Magical Creatures from third year and up." She rattled off, counting off on her fingers.

Hadrian scrunched up his nose at the choices. "Well, there are the core classes that every grade has, from elementary to high school, like Transfiguration, Potions, Charms, and Arithmancy for the magical side and English, Science, Social Studies, and Math for the nonmagical side."

Lisa opened her mouth to ask something when the door slid open again, this time revealing a tall lanky boy with short dark hair that had been styled with gel and big dark brown eyes. Another first year.

"Could I sit with you guys? The other kids I asked don't want a firstie sitting with them, I guess." He shrugged nonchalantly, apparently not bothered by it.

Hadrian shrugged as well, not particularly caring one way or the other, and Lisa just moved over to give the boy room to sit. He did and held his hand out first to Lisa then to Hadrian.

"Terry Boot, nice to meet you." Terry introduced himself with a smile. "What're we talking about?"

"Hadrian was telling me about the schools in America." Lisa said. "I'm Lisa Turpin by the way."

"Hadrian Romanoff."

"You from the States?" Terry asked with a raised eyebrow. Hadrian nodded.

"Hadrian says that they start their schooling when they're five years old and that most of their wizarding schools also teach muggle subjects. And that the... what did you call them? Core classes?" Lisa turned to ask Hadrian who nodded. "Yeah, core classes are Transfiguration, Potions, Charms, Arithmancy for witches and wizards and... what were the muggle ones?"


Terry looked confused. "You have a class that teaches you how to speak English? And how to be social?"

Hadrian almost laughed at the confusion. "No, uh, English is a class that teaches you how to write essays and term papers, and also study and analyze literary works. Social Studies is basically
"And science is what muggles do instead of magic, right?" Lisa added.

"Pretty much." There was no way Hadrian was going to go into more detail about the different branches of science compared to the branches of magic and what science could do that magic can't and visa versa. If they really wanted to know he would just tell them to write his Uncle Tony - the man would probably send a several pages of rambling explanations back that would somehow manage to include his opinion on deep fried Twinkies.

"What about electives?" Terry asked curiously.

"Well, for magicals there's the usual Care of Magical Creatures and Ancient Runes, but we don't have Muggle Studies or anything because when you first start school depending on your upbringing you have a Magical Customs course or a Nonmagical Customs course so most already know the differences and such." Lisa's eyes were wide and Terry looked thoughtful.

"A Wizarding Customs class would probably help lot for confused muggleborns." He said.

Hadrian nodded. "Uh, there's an advanced Arithmancy class as well. Plus Basic Healing and Advanced Healing which is split between years, Dueling which is considered a sport along with Quidditch and Quadpot on the magical side, Magical Art, Ghoul Studies which is like a companion class to Care of Magical Creatures, Beginner, Intermediate, and Advanced Warding, Wand Crafting, Spell Crafting, and I think a few more I can't remember. Oh! And Magical Languages, mostly Goblin Tongue, High Elvish, and Mermish."

Lisa and Terry were staring at him with their mouths open, obviously not expecting that many offered classes.

"How can there be so many?" Lisa exclaimed.

"Well, you have more years to take them, and a lot of them can be taken for one semester so you can take another for the second semester. And you have, like, a week at the beginning of the school year and second semester to see if you like it or if you want to change your schedule."

Terry was close to pouting. "And that's just the magical side, right? What about the muggle classes?"

"And Herbology?" Lisa added, recalling that Hadrian hadn't mentioned the class when he spoke about the core classes.

"Herbology and Botany, the nonmagical equivalent of Herbology, are part of science courses." Hadrian said. His nose scrunched up as he tried to remember all the nonmagical electives he could. "For the nonmagical electives, well, there's a whole lot of them and they differ depending on the school district. My school district had Art, Creative Writing, Wood Shop, Yearbook, Photography, Auto Shop, Library Aide, Health, plus Spanish and French are the common language classes. There's Theatre, Choir, and Band and a bunch of computer classes."

"Not possible." Lisa shook her head determinately. "There's no way for one school to have so many classes."

Hadrian shrugged. "What can I say? That's not even mentioning all the clubs, though most of them are part of elective classes, but there's also AV Club, Glee Club, Book Club, and others."

Terry exhaled loudly. "And sports? You mentioned Quidditch, Quadpot, and Dueling."
"Um, basketball, football, track and field, fencing, volleyball, swimming, tennis, soccer, cheerleading, and gymnastics. I think some schools have baseball, too." Hadrian had never realized how overwhelming this could all sound to someone who had grown up expecting six main classes and five offered electives.

"You gave all that up to come here? Won't you be bored or something?" Lisa questioned incredulously. "I can't imagine having all those classes and then getting stuck with a handful."

"Yeah, mate, I know Hogwarts is the oldest magical school and has put out some pretty great witches and wizards, but a lot people think it's been stagnating lately, especially those who have relatives at Durmstrang and Beauxbatons. They both have more classes than Hogwarts, but nowhere near the States it seems."

"Hogwarts is a legend and most of the professors are considered to be a genius in their fields, plus three of my uncles and one of my aunties went to Hogwarts and they all have amazing stories to tell." Hadrian said, hoping neither of them would ask more about it. "My mom says I can try it out for a year and if I don't like I can just enroll back in my old school. I might have to do a bit of catch up with the other kids, but that's fine."

"If you go, take me with you?" Lisa pleaded jokingly - maybe.

Terry laughed, sounding a lot like Sirius. "Yeah, we'll stowaway in your trunk and leave golems behind for our parents."

Lisa tilted her head. "What are you going to do if you do decide to go back after this year? Won't you have a lot of school work to catch up with?"

"Well, my mom set it up so that I'm basically being homeschooled for this year so I'll still complete the course work and everything. I just have to work it around the Hogwarts lessons." Hadrian shrugged. "It'll actually be easier than it seems since I won't have a lot of the other lessons I usually have as well so I'll probably have a lot of free time. That'll be weird."

"Over achiever," Terry coughed out.

They barely noticed the door open and a lanky red headed boy with a face full of freckles standing there. He frowned when he noticed the compartment already had people in it and stalked off.

"Is he still looking for a compartment? What's he been doing since the train started?" Terry wondered.

"Maybe he's looking for Harry Potter," Lisa suggested half heartedly.

Of course, as soon as she said that the door slid open and a slight boy with shocking platinum blond hair and an upturned nose stepped in. He, at least, introduced himself as Draco Malfoy and rather candidly announced that he was looking for Harry Potter.

"Haven't seen him." Terry said while Lisa shook her head and Hadrian shrugged.

Draco turned to leave before turning back and asking their names.

"Terry Boot."

"Lisa Turpin."

"Hadrian Romanoff."
Draco's eyes narrowed slightly at Hadrian's last name. "You wouldn't happen to be related to the Romanov Clan? Father says they're known for their magical power and their distinctive green eyes."

Hadrian knew for a fact that he wasn't, but his mother very well could be related to them in some way. Not wanting to commit himself to something he wasn't sure about, he shrugged and said, "I'm a Romanoff."

Draco looked at him appraisingly for a several seconds before nodding curtly and leaving, nearly slamming the compartment door shut behind him.

Lisa turned to Hadrian. "Are you related to the Romanov Clan or did you just say that to get him off your back?"

"I honestly have no idea. I have my mom's name and she has eyes just like mine so it's possible that we're distant relatives." Hadrian explained casually. He might have his mom look into it, just for fun. "But my mom's not magical so I don't know for sure." He grinned slightly when neither of them had any reaction to that little tidbit.

"Hadrian, could I have another granola? I'm still a bit hungry and the trolley lady only sells sweets." Lisa asked, holding her empty wrapper up for show.

"Yeah, yeah, Terry, you want one? I also have some cookies if you do want something sweet. Oh! Uncle Bruce must've slipped these into my bag when I wasn't looking." Hadrian exclaimed happily as he pulled out a cool to the touch lunchbox. Briefly wondering who charmed it, he opened to find several sandwiches and small baggies of chips. "You guys want one? Let's see, we got p-b-and-j, smoked ham, turkey, bologna, and brisket. And for chips I have regular potato chips and sour cream and onion."

"Chips?" Terry pointed at the small bags.

"Uh, crisps? That's what you call them here right?" Hadrian corrected.

Lisa looked over the choices offered to her before picking up a smoked ham sandwich and baggie of potato chips. "Thanks Hadrian, I'll make it up to you if you want something off the trolley."

Hadrian waved her off as Terry took two peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and Hadrian picked out a brisket and a bag of sour cream and onion chips for himself. Without further ado, Hadrian peeled the top piece of bread off his sandwich and poured his chips out onto it before putting it back together. He took a bite out of his creation and looked up to see Lisa and Terry watching him in amusement.

"What?" Hadrian asked around his food, though he remembered to put a hand in front of his mouth like he had been taught. "I like crunch." He defended.

"Sure, mate." Terry laughed before taking a bite out of his own sandwich.

Lisa swallowed her mouthful. "Do you have more juice? I finished mine already. Another apple, please, if you do."

"One for me, too, mate." Terry said with food still in his mouth, not bothering to hide it behind his hand to Lisa's disgust. Hadrian laughed and threw them their juice boxes and put his own lemonade in his lap.

They all ate in peace, the only sounds being the crunch of the chips and Lisa occasionally smacking Terry's arm whenever he chewed with his mouth open. Lisa and Hadrian were finished with their
food, Terry half way through his second sandwich, when the door slid open once again. Lisa caught Hadrian's attention and rolled her eyes.

"Have any of you seen a toad? Neville's lost his." A small girl with bushy light brown hair asked, her head tilted slightly up so it seemed she was looking down at them.

Terry and Hadrian shook their heads while Lisa answered for them. "No, but if we do we'll be sure to let you or him know." She promised with a smile.

The girl huffed a bit at that. "Well, alright. Be sure to let me know if you see it."

Just as she turned to leave, Hadrian got an idea. "You could ask one of the prefects, or an older year at least, to use a summoning charm for you."

"Hmm. I have read about that charm, but never managed to practice it at home." The girl said almost haughtily.

"H-hi, Her-Hermione, have y-you found Tr-Tr-Trevor yet?" A soft stammer came from behind Hermione, who moved to the side to show a chubby boy with light brown hair darkening at the roots. He seemed to be trying to stop himself from crying and looked close to pathetic.

"No, Neville, but we can always ask a prefect to do the summoning charm. They're responsible and would do it if we asked respectfully." Hermione said pointedly.

Terry piped up. "Yeah, mate, Hadrian here just thought of it. If any of us knew how to do it we would help you out, but a prefect's the next best thing. You should ask a Hufflepuff first, though."

Neville straightened a bit at that and didn't look so close to crying anymore. "Really? Thanks, uh, Hadrian?"

Hadrian stood up and reached his hand out. "Hadrian Romanoff. Nice to meet you, Neville."

"Longbottom. I'm Neville Longbottom." Something flashed across Hadrian's face at the name, but no one could see just what it was before he was smiling widely.

"That's Terry Boot and the lovely lady sitting next to him is Lisa Turpin." Hadrian introduced, making Neville and Lisa flush.

"You're from America?" Hermione asked. "How did you get an invitation to Hogwarts? It's only supposed to be for those from the British Isles."

"Was born in London, name got put in the registry." Hadrian waved it off, but Hermione didn't seem to want to let it go at that.

"So you got a Hogwarts letter and convinced your parents to let you go? Of course, I'm not surprised that they agreed, it is the most highly renown and prestigious magical school." Hermione added with a touch of superiority. "I mean, when I got my Hogwarts letter, I was ever so excited. Especially after I read Hogwarts: A History. I'm the first witch in my family so it came as quite a shock and I had to learn about everything on my own from books I got in Diagon Alley. I even managed to talk my father into getting me all the books about Albus Dumbledore, the greatest wizard of our time, and Harry Potter, the Boy-Who-Lived. I've read all about both of them, you know, to be prepared. Even the spells I tried out at home all worked for me on the first try."

Terry, Lisa, and Neville were stunned by the load of information, not understanding her point, if she did indeed have one.
Hadrian, on the other hand, just tilted his head as if in thought. "I thought it was against the law for minors to do magic at home."

When Lisa confirmed that it was, Hermione glowered at them for a moment before grabbing Neville's sleeve and pulling him away to go find a prefect to do the spell. After they were gone, Lisa, Hadrian, and Terry shared a disbelieving look before promptly bursting into laughter.

Albus Dumbledore sat at his desk, a pensive frown on his face. His trip to the Dursley household had revealed his worst fear - Harry Potter was gone. Missing. Lost. Petunia was adamant that she had never found the boy on her doorstep on a cold November morning and a subtle look into her mind had shown that her memories hadn't been tampered with. Similarly her husband hadn't come across the babe first and chosen to get rid of him before his wife found him, an act that Albus wouldn't have put past the contrary man. The way the large man spoke to him was an absolute disgrace.

Regardless of the distasteful way those muggles treated him the real issue was the disappearance of the Boy-Who-Lived. The boy had been missing for ten years and he hadn't even known something was amiss until Minerva had said something. If only he had bothered to check in on the boy before now, he could have had time to find him. Now it was too late and there was no way the boy would be on the train come September first.

His only hope was that wherever the boy was - whoever had taken the child - would send him anyway but that was a faint hope that he didn't focus on too much.

He could perhaps make a golem in the image of the illustrations from the many fictional stories written about the Boy-Who-Lived and use it as a holdover until he found the boy but he would have to keep a watchful eye on it to insure no one noticed something was wrong and it would be easy to cause damage to the vessel that he wouldn't be able to hide. All it would take was the golem being partnered with a horrendous student in potions and having it spilled on it.

With a sigh he put his half formed plans away for the moment. The only thing he knew with certainty was that he would have to work on damage control once it was revealed the Boy-Who-Lived wasn't at Hogwarts.
Hadrian stood anxiously between Terry and Lisa while they waited for Professor McGonagall to return to lead them to the Great Hall to be sorted. The stern witch had led them to the entrance hall and left them with a brief summation of what was to happen and a warning to make themselves presentable.

Lisa had had to help brush crumbs off of Terry, some of which had somehow gotten into his hair. Neville had nervously tried to fix his crooked tie until Hadrian had enough and slapped his hands away to do it himself.

The red haired boy from the train rubbed at the spot of dirt on his nose after Hermione had pointed it out, glowering at the girl to her confusion.

A dark haired girl with a nose like a pug's loudly wondered about what the sorting entailed to another girl with plaited blond hair and thin lips.

"Fred says it's a troll you have to wrestle." The redheaded boy, face now clean, said with a shiver of fear, sending a wave of irrational panic through the first years.

"What do you suppose it is?" Terry asked Lisa and Hadrian.

"A spell cast by the headmaster or a professor that reveals someone's most prominent traits." Lisa answered promptly.

"Makes sense. Or maybe the spell makes you glow a certain color based on your personality traits and you go to that respective house. Like if you glow red or gold you go to Gryffindor." Terry added, an excited gleam in his eye as he thought of the possibilities of the sorting. "What do you think Hadrian?" He asked, turning to the shorter boy.

"I have no idea. I tried asking my uncles, the ones who went here, but they wouldn't say a word. Said it was tradition to rile up the first years." Hadrian pouted. "I doubt it involves a troll though, or us showing off all the spells we know."

"My older sister tried to convince me that they make you strip and if the color of your underwear matches the house colors then that's the house you get sorted in. Mum finally had to tell her to knock it off when she started talking about all the 'poor souls' who unfortunately went commando for their first day." Lisa shuddered.

"Sounds like something my Uncle Clint would do." Hadrian said with a chuckle, his nerves settling as he relaxed. "I feel so silly getting worked up about what the sorting is. Does it even matter? We're gonna get sorted no matter what."

"Try telling that to Neville over there." Terry pointed at the chubby boy who looked to be on the verge of a full blown panic attack.
Hadrian didn't say anything, only moved to stand closer to Neville. Lisa and Terry followed after him and Neville paused in his erratic breathing to look at them in confusion.

"Hey, Nev, what do you think the sorting is?" Terry asked casually.

"W-what?" The poor boy looked hopelessly lost.

"Lisa thinks it's a spell the headmaster casts and I kinda agree. What do you think?"

Neville blinked. "Oh, uh," he stammered. "Maybe a riddle?"

"Oh, like whatever your answer is shows what house you best belong to?" Lisa asked in excitement.

Neville nodded his head slowly, still looking unsure.

Hadrian groaned. "Oh, I absolutely suck at riddles."

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"A hat." Hadrian deadpanned. "These people almost gave a bunch of eleven year olds heart attacks over a hat."

Lisa hid a giggle behind her hand while Terry choked trying to hold his own laughter in. Neville's lips twitched in humor.

"A stinkin' hat."

"Yes, Hadrian, a hat. Now hush, it's about to start." Terry said just as Professor McGonagall pulled out a parchment with a list of names on it.

"Abbot, Hannah." A pink faced girl with blond pigtails that Hadrian recognized walked up to the stool where the Sorting Hat sat and was soon placed in Hufflepuff. Hadrian caught her eye and waved at her. She smiled brightly and waved back.

"Boot, Terry," Was called next.

Hadrian clapped his friend on the back. "Do us proud, Terry."

Terry sent him a grin before walking quickly up to the stool. It took several long moments after the hat was placed on his head before he was sorted into Ravenclaw, blue and bronze appearing on his robe and tie. Hadrian sent him a thumbs up, Neville waved shyly at him, and Lisa clapped hard enough for the entire hall.

"Guess his underwear's blue." Hadrian whispered to Lisa who promptly choked.

Professor McGonagall continued down the list. Some of the sortings took a minute or two, but most only took about thirty seconds, a few even being shorter than that. Each time a first year was sorted into their house, the hall would applaud them, though whenever there was a new Slytherin it was much quieter compared to the others.

"Granger, Hermione." Hermione moved past Lisa, bumping into her slightly, as she walked eagerly up to the stool. When the hat was settled on her head, her face scrunched up harshly.

Lisa leaned in to Hadrian and Neville. "What is she doing?" She whispered, her eyes still on the girl getting sorted.
"I think she's trying to argue with the hat, but she might just be constipated." Hadrian murmured back.

"Gryffindor!" The Hat bellowed.

Hermione shot up off the stool with a triumphant grin and practically skipped to the Gryffindor table where she took a seat next to Lavender Brown who frowned slightly at the state of the girl's hair.

Sensing Neville's nerves return full force, Hadrian reached over and placed a calming hand on the boy's shoulder. Lisa nudged Neville to get his attention and sent him a smile. He managed to smile back.

"Longbottom, Neville." With one final pat on the back from Hadrian, Neville walked slowly up to the stool, looking resigned and frightened at the same time.

He sat down on the stool, Professor McGonagall placing the much too large hat over his head. After several seconds Hadrian and Lisa saw Neville look up at the brim of the hat before a determined expression made its way onto his face. His chubby hands clenched around the edges of the stool. Hadrian and Lisa waited with baited breath. "Gryffindor!" They let out relieved laughs while Neville excitedly ran to Gryffindor table, forgetting that the Sorting Hat was still on his head. He sheepishly returned it to an amused McGonagall before sitting down across from Seamus Finnigan. He waved at Hadrian and Lisa, twisting in his seat to send one to Terry - who was busy whistling loudly in support.

"I'll be next." Hadrian whispered. Lisa took his hand in hers in response.

Draco was called up and the hat needed to only just barely touch the top of his head before bellowing out Slytherin. The blond only smirked and swaggered over to his table, not looking the least bit surprised, but cocky all the same. Hadrian rolled his eyes and Lisa muttered something under her breath that Hadrian did not want to know about.

McGonagall slowly made her way down the list, with each sorting the atmosphere thickening in anticipation. It was almost suffocating by the time she got to the Patil twins, Padma going to Ravenclaw and Parvati going to Gryffindor. The sisters sent each other saddened expressions at being separated, though neither looked all that surprised at the split. Sally Anne Perks was called up next and promptly sorted into Hufflepuff. The students held their breath.

"Potter, Harry!" The entire hall went quiet as everyone craned their necks to get a glimpse of the Boy-Who-Lived coming forward from the decreasing gaggle of first years. When no one made any move to step forward, a few actually moving aside in case he was standing behind them, whispers broke out among the students and some of the staff.

Hadrian wondered how his birth name was still on the list of incoming students as he hadn't sent back an acceptance under the name. He hadn't even received a Hogwarts letter under the name. He and everyone back home had figured that a non-answer was the same as a rejection and would have removed Harry Potter's name from the list if it wasn't already gone. Unless everyone was so sure that Harry Potter would be at Hogwarts that they ignored the obvious and wrote his name down any way which wasn't out of the realm of possibility.

Whatever the answer, Hadrian knew that no one was going to step forward.

The whispers were steadily getting louder and a few of the lower years actually looked panicked at the thought that the Boy-Who-Lived wasn't at the school.
"Potter, Harry!" McGonagall tried again earnestly. "Would Harry Potter please step forward so that he may be sorted?"

The students still waiting to be sorted shared confused looks, Hadrian putting on a show of looking at the others as if trying to figure out which one could be the Boy-Who-Lived.

When no one stepped forward once again, McGonagall sighed and moved on to the next name. Which just happened to be,

"Romanoff, Hadrian!"

Hadrian walked up to the stool with a confident step, looking not at all bothered by the lack of attention on him. McGonagall glanced at him and turned away to look at the staff table before her head twisted back to give him a second look. Hadrian peered up innocently at her, wondering if she had noticed the similarities to his birth parents. Finally she looked away again though he still felt a pair of eyes on the back of his head.

Hadrian sat down on the uncomfortable stool, noticing that only a few were paying attention to his sorting.

'Well, it seems I'll be sorting Harry Potter after all.'

Hadrian probably would have jumped at the apparent disembodied voice, but he had been partly raised by JARVIS.

'Aah, yes, JARVIS. You seem to have fond memories for something that isn't a real person.'

Hadrian scowled harshly, shocking the few watching him. 'JARVIS is as real as you or me. Uncle Tony may have made him out of code, but somehow JARVIS has grown to have a consciousness. Uncle Clint thinks it's because Tony has always treated JARVIS like a person and everyone else does, too.'

The Sorting Hat chuckled at the defense. 'I think I would very much like to meet this JARVIS and the man who brought him into being, but first, your sorting. Where should you go?'

'I don't know. I thought that was your job.' Hadrian thought cheekily. The Hat smacked the side of his face with its brim.

'Brat.' It sounded amused. 'Now, let's see. You're as loyal as a dog, but mainly to those who have earned it, cautiousness having been bred into you. And quite rightly at that, Mr. Romanoff. You would do well in Ravenclaw after studying under... Loki! Dear Merlin!'

Hadrian nearly laughed out loud at the disbelief.

'Yes, I see you would do just fine among the eagles, though it is not for you, is it? You enjoy learning things for the sake of it, but don't go out of your way to do so.' Hadrian could only shrug at that. Growing up with the odd bunch that he did, there was always someone who was eager to show off what they just learned or discovered. Thor especially loved taking him out to try new foods. 'Gryffindor or Slytherin? You can be just as foolhardy and courageous as your godfather, yet have nearly every bit of cunning and guile as your mother and... Uncle Loki.'

Hadrian snorted at that. 'No one has as much cunning as Mom and Uncle Loki. And he outclasses even her. Don't tell her I said that.' He added hurriedly, even though he knew no one would know what was being said unless he told them. Better safe than sorry.
'I did say nearly,' The Hat grumbled before continuing. 'I do believe that I'll leave it up to you to decide.'

Hadrian closed his eyes in thought. If he chose Gryffindor, he would be following in the steps of his birth parents and dogfathers, and he would also be in the same house as Neville. If he chose Slytherin, he would be constantly surrounded by people who would keep him on his toes and he knew his mom and most of his uncles would approve. It would also lessen any connections people might make between him and Harry Potter.

'Can I flip a coin?' He finally asked, unable to make the choice himself. The Hat merely shrugged, as much as someone without shoulders can shrug.

'Tails for Slytherin, heads for Gryffindor.' Hadrian dug around in his pocket and pulled out a penny, bright and shiny, flipping it off of his thumb like Clint had taught him, catching it and turning it over onto the back of his hand. He could feel the Sorting Hat leaning over to look at the verdict.

His friends were staring him in surprise as well as the few others who had deigned to pay attention to his sorting. A pair of red haired twins were sporting insane grins.

'Very well,' The Hat humphed, apparently offended that a penny had done his job for him.

"Slytherin!" It bellowed out, catching the attention of the hall once more.

Hadrian stood up and placed the hat back in Professor McGonagall's hands before making his way to the table sitting under the green and silver banner. He sat at the end of the table, next to Theodore Nott and across from Millicent Bulstrode. Theodore sent him a small nod while Millicent reached over to shake his hand quickly.

Hadrian glanced over at Lisa who was looking at him worriedly and sent her a smile, calming her enough for her to smile back. He looked over at Terry next who nodded and smiled then Neville who gave him a thumbs up. Relieved that his new friends weren't going to abandon him because of the color of his tie, Hadrian relaxed in his seat and turned his attention to the sorting.

Lisa was soon called up, sitting under the hat for a full minute before it shouted out Ravenclaw. Lisa happily walked to the Ravenclaw table and sat down next to Terry, who threw an arm around her in congratulations.

Finally, the sorting ended when Blaise Zabini was sorted into Slytherin and took a seat next to Draco. He didn't receive much applause.

Hadrian ignored when the headmaster stood up, bringing most conversation to a standstill as focus fell on him, and spoke merrily. Judging by the sneers and incredulous looks he wasn't missing anything too important, though he did vaguely hear something about a horrible and painful death. He would probably have to look into that later. Dumbledore eventually sat down, the food appearing with a flourish.

Hadrian grimaced when he saw that they only offered pumpkin juice, something he quickly figured out he didn't have a taste for and felt had way too much sugar. He figured he would have to ask the house elves if they served anything else with dinner or if the pumpkin juice only option only happened during feasts.

If not then he'd have to bring his bag with him to dinner and perhaps lunch as well so that he wouldn't go into diabetic shock two weeks into the school year. Of course he'd have to dodge any questions from his house mates but if he managed to get a hold of a goblet similar to the ones the
school used then no one should give him a second look.

Absently putting biscuits - scones? - on his plate and covering them in gravy Hadrian made a mental note to mirror call home the first chance he got to let everyone know what house he had been sorted into and about his new friends - as well as the fact that Harry Potter was still on the list of incoming students.

Just as he was scooping some mashed potatoes on his plate, Lily Moon - a short girl with shiny brown hair that reached to her hips - glanced around the table before leaning in dramatically.

"Say, where do you think Harry Potter is?"

"I always heard that he's been hidden away in some castle or manor somewhere being trained by Dumbledore." Millicent said, her dark eyes gleaming at the opportunity for gossip. Hadrian's hand twitched. "Maybe they decided Hogwarts would get in the way."

"Why would he need training?" Tracey Davis asked curiously.

"Might have to do with all the crazy dark wizards everyone is so sure are after him." Daphne Greengrass sniffed, not looking particularly interested in the conversation.

Lily rolled her eyes. "Like they could do anything to him at Hogwarts. It's the safest place there is."

Hadrian hid a smirk behind his bite of chicken.

"Well, I heard that he's actually a squib and Dumbledore just doesn't want to admit it." Pansy Parkinson, the girl with a pug nose, said nastily.

"Oh, shut it, Pansy." Draco snapped. "Unless you want to be known as the girl who thinks the Dark Lord was killed by a baby squib."

Pansy paled dramatically then colored even more so, hunching in on herself slightly. "It was just a rumor I heard." She tried to defend.

"I don't even see what it matters," Blaise said, his soft voice making the others focus their attention on him to hear what he was saying. "He's not here now which suggests he's not going to be here anytime soon. It's no use trying to figure out the whys and hows when it doesn't matter."

"Well said," Theo said quietly, going unnoticed by the others.

Draco scoffed. "Of course it matters, Zabini. At least to me."

Hadrian decided to test the waters. "Oh, really?" He drawled, bringing the focus to himself. "Is it because in terms of succession the title of Lord Black could fall to either you, as your mother was a Black, or Harry Potter, whose grandmother and godfather were both Blacks?"

The other first years stared at him before slowly turning their heads to look at the equally shocked Draco.

"How do you know that, Romanoff?"

"Matter of public record." Hadrian said easily.

Draco narrowed his eyes, appraising the unknown boy. Finding nothing he could use at the moment he nodded. "You are correct. My chances of inheriting the title would grow if the beloved Harry Potter doesn't make an appearance in the wizarding world proper."
"So it doesn't really matter," Blaise repeated. "So long as he doesn't appear, you should be on the fast track to holding dual titles. *Gloria, Malfoy."

Gregory Goyle, a beast of a boy, blinked. "His name is Draco."

Hadrian shot a look upwards, wondering if Heimdall was slapping his forehead at the comment. Then he wondered if he and Loki had ever got together and complained about the idiotic things they saw and put up with all the time.

"Romanoff, why did you toss a coin during your sorting?" Lily asked, interrupting Hadrian's planning of getting Heimdall, Loki, Pepper, Coulson, and Maria together for a tea party.

"Oh, reasons."

"As in?" She pressed.

"As in the kind that made me toss a coin."

"Aw, come on, Romanoff, what kind of answer is that?" Lily pouted.

"The kind that I just used." Hadrian smiled, "I can do this all night, Moon." He tensed when he felt his bag vibrate - someone was calling his mirror. Theo, being the closest to him, noticed and raised a dark eyebrow at him in question. Hadrian wasn't sure what to say exactly so he said nothing. Prestige built on not knowing what to say - always worked.

Mostly.

Sometimes.

That one time at Chuck E. Cheese.
Hadrian followed quietly behind the fifth year prefect who was leading the first years to the Slytherin dorms. As they made their way through the winding corridors the prefect, Lathaniel Mire, pointed out different routes that would lead them to different parts of the castle, most of which led out to the classrooms.

Hadrian was almost certain that the other first years were memorizing the short cuts being shown to them and if he was wrong, he was certain that the ones who did would take the help with a grain of salt. Hazing the new guys was a tradition that crossed all gender, race, age, and species.

Hadrian stood at the back of the group, behind Tracey and Daphne, who kept glancing back at him for some reason. Draco, and his bodyguards who looked too big to be eleven year olds Gregory Goyle and Vincent Crabbe along with Pansy, were at the front of the charge, the blond talking about something his father did or said and completely ignoring what Lathaniel was saying. Theo was walking with Blaise and Lily just behind Draco, leaving Millicent to stand off to the side by herself.

Too busy focusing on the routes being pointed out to him, Hadrian almost missed when the group stopped and was close to bumping into the back of Daphne.

"You will go inside and wait for our Head of House to welcome you into the Snake Pit. Be sure to show him the proper respect a man of his station deserves." Lathaniel lectured. "The password is 'Snake Eyes' and though the password changes every two weeks, you should be sure not to forget. Not everyone will be willing to remind you."

The prefect turned to hiss the password to the snake statue wrapped around the entrance door. "Inside, the lot of you. Remember what I said."

The first years dutifully marched into the common room of the Slytherin dorms, congregating in the middle of the room in full view of everyone. Hadrian briefly wondered how they all got there before them.

Hadrian looked around the room, mentally comparing it to the Gryffindor common room he had seen in pictures his uncles shown him. In contrast to the loud red and gold, overstuffed furniture, and general vacation cabin in the woods feel, the Slytherin common room was done in forest green and silver accents, snake carvings on every wall alongside paintings of former Slytherins who had gone on to infamy, and practical leather couches and chairs and dark wood tables. A floor to ceiling bookcase stood against the back wall with snake bookends on every shelf. Lanterns lined the walls giving the whole room a soft glow.

It reminded Hadrian of his mom.

A sudden overwhelming presence caught Hadrian's attention and he turned back to the entrance to see their Head of House standing there, looking down at the group of first years like they were a waste of his time, a sneer threatening to break across his severe face.
Severus Snape, Head of Slytherin, Potions Master, former Slytherin, and most important of all, Lily Evans' former best friend.

"If you do not already know," Snape started, prepared to eviscerate any one who did not know. "I am Professor Severus Snape, your Head of House and potions professor."

The man didn't raise his voice, but his words still rang through the whole room. Hadrian had no doubt that even the older years were focused on the professor and his command of authority.

"When you walk these halls, you are not only representing yourself, your family, and your house, you are representing me," Snape paused to allow even more emphasis on the last word. "And I do not care to be represented by brain dead, ignorant fools who believe themselves above the rules. Hence why I am not the Head of Gryffindor."

A few students laughed nervously at that, looking anxious when they realized they were only bringing focus to themselves.

Snape silenced them all with a look. "In addition to the rules of this school, you will be operating under my own Golden Three. One, you are not to walk anywhere without someone by your side. The other houses look down at us and will surely take the opportunity to make their displeasure known."

Hadrian grimaced at that, knowing that's just what his uncles and father used to do when they were at Hogwarts. He knew that Professor Snape especially was familiar with the tactic of going after a snake by himself.

It was something he had been taught in his training but he had also been forbidden from using it outside of missions or harmless pranks on friends and family. Sirius and Remus had both been quite forceful in making that point, not wanting to see their godson go down the path they had when they were young and arrogant.

"Two, any personal grievances amongst you are to be kept within these walls. Should you present anything less than an united front to the other students, they will use it to their advantage."

Hadrian found himself nodding. His mom and Agent Uncle had drilled that into him from a young age, telling him that any discord within a team or between partners was brought out onto the field would only spell trouble.

It used to amaze Hadrian when the Avengers would fight together seamlessly even if Uncle Clint had pissed off his mom or if Uncle Loki was subjecting his brother to the silent treatment. Of course now it just made him laugh when they returned from a mission and his mom dealt out her punishment once they had recuperated.

His mind briefly wondered to the thought of writing the rules on a blackboard in the common room as a reminder - like an elementary school classroom. He had to bite back a snicker when he imagined putting up one of those outrageously colored educational posters teachers were so fond of all over the dungeon. It would surely brighten the place up.

"And three, don't get caught." With a flourish Snape was gone, leaving a group of stunned eleven year olds behind.

Somewhere Loki was cackling.

Lathaniel walked up to them with a smirk. "Close your mouths, you'll catch flies." Before he could say anything else, Hadrian raised his hand. "Yes, Romanoff?"
"Where can I find a copy of the Hogwarts Charter?" The green eyed boy asked innocently, immediately arousing suspicion from the other students.

"There's one in the library, though you can't check it out." Lathaniel answered. "Why?"

Hadrian shrugged. "My mother taught me that it's best to learn all the rules early on." In order to find ways around them, of course.

Lathaniel looked at him with consideration. "Well, I supposed you could always copy down the rules on parchment. Unless you would prefer to save your hand the trouble and owl order for one. Though it would probably deplete your allowance twice over."

Hadrian only nodded, ignoring the attempt to see if he was worried about the money.

"Now, a few things that Professor Snape has left for me to explain, though if you have any sense you will already know." Lathaniel didn't have the presence that their Head of House did, but he was still a prefect and in a position of authority so they paid attention. Lathaniel smirked. "Slytherin is expected to have at least three students in the top ten of each year. Some years have strived to completely dominate the entirety of the top ten, though none have actually done so."

Hadrian took in the blank expressions of Gregory and Vincent and knew that that they were out of the running already.

"Regarding the other houses," Lathaniel continued. "Ravenclaw is tolerated, Hufflepuff is ignored, and Gryffindor is the bane of our existence. Any questions?" Tracey raised her hand slowly.

"Yes, Davis?"

Tracey lowered her arm and glanced around nervously when she noticed all eyes were on her. "What did Professor Snape mean when he said not to get caught? I mean, if we're supposed to be following the rules like he said, what do we not get caught with?"

"Is it really breaking the rules if no one knows?" Blaise answered the girl before an older year could cut into her for her naivety.

Lathaniel smirked at that. "A snake in the grass is a snake unnoticed. A snake unnoticed is a snake in charge."

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Professor Severus Snape didn't bother to hide his grimace as he entered the headmaster's office where the other Heads of House and Madam Pomfrey were already sitting. He was usually the last to enter at the start of year meetings as even though Pomona and Filius also gave welcoming speeches to their respective houses, Severus stayed behind unseen to make sure that his first years understood. This year he stayed behind even longer out of worry and curiosity for the muggleborn first year.

"Nice of you to join us, Severus." Dumbledore said with genial grin.

Severus didn't say anything to that and took his seat next to Flitwick.

Dumbledore didn't let the lack of response deter him. "I'm sure you all know what we're here to discuss, seeing as we do it every year." The old man chuckled at his own joke, though no one joined him. "Tell me, Filius, how are your new students doing? I recall there being only one muggleborn being sorted into your house, do you think she'll feel welcome?"
"Oh, cut it out, Albus!" Minerva exclaimed, earning shocked looks from the other teachers. "You know damn well why we're here tonight and it's not to talk about the new muggleborn Ravenclaw. No offense, Filius, but we can talk about Miss Li's situation at a later date."

Filius nodded his head in agreement. "None taken. Though I would like to say that Morag McDougal has already taken Su under her wing, so to speak."

"Then we can turn our attention to the matter at hand." Pomona spoke up, Poppy nodding behind her.

"And what might that be?" Severus cut in, though he already knew what they were alluding to, and it made his skin crawl.

"Where is Harry Potter?" Minerva asked Dumbledore directly. "You told me that you personally delivered the boy's letter, so where is he, Albus?"

Severus scoffed. "Showing the Potter brat special treatment already? Can't imagine what that will do the boy's no doubt arrogant nature."

Minerva turned to face him, a fierce look in her small eyes. "Oh, hush, Severus! You haven't even met the boy and you're already taking out your hatred for his father on him. I won't stand for it!"

"Albus," Filius said, hoping to curtail the argument before it got out of hand. "When you delivered the letter, did Mister Potter give you any indication that he wouldn't attend? Perhaps the muggles you placed him with didn't know how to get him to the station."

"Ah, well," Dumbledore began. He turned away slightly to avoid their gazes. "When I told Minerva that I had delivered the letter, I may have skirted a few truths. Only to ensure that no one would panic and do something rash before I found a way to solve the issue." The wizard added hurriedly when he saw his staff gearing up to shout at him.

"What issue?" Poppy asked curiously, though there was an edge to her voice.

"It seems that Hogwarts didn't know where to send Harry's letter." Dumbledore answered and resigned himself to the blow up.

Minerva was at the front of the charge to no one's surprise. "What do you mean Hogwarts didn't know how to find the boy? Was it those wards you constantly go on about whenever someone asks to visit him? And that still doesn't explain why he didn't arrive at the school! Did you even go to give him his letter or did you just hope that it would work itself out?"

"I did go to the Dursley's." Dumbledore answered. The name gave Severus a start and the dour man narrowed his eyes at the headmaster.

"And? What did Harry say when you spoke about him coming to Hogwarts?" Minerva prompted.

"Was the boy alright? I doubt that the muggles would know to get him immunized against magical ailments." Poppy added fretfully, rubbing her hands together at the thought.

Dumbledore sighed loudly. "When I arrived at the Dursley household, I discovered that young Harry was not there."

One of the trinkets lining the headmaster's shelves exploded, showering the room with golden sparks. Everyone turned to stare wide eyed at Minerva, who was standing up to her full height and glowering down at the seated Dumbledore. At some point her wand had made it into her hand and
the tip of it was sparkling in warning.

A lioness on the prowl, Filius mused.

"Explain, Albus," she ordered once she managed to reel in her magic a bit.

With another put upon sigh, Dumbledore explained. "As I said, when Hogwarts was unable to locate the boy to send him his letter, I made the trip to the Dursley residence myself, both to deliver the letter and check on the wards. Unfortunately, when I arrived I found that the wards I had carefully placed on the perimeter weren't there, and even worse, when I knocked on the door to inquire about the wellbeing of the boy, Petunia quite vehemently told me that she had no idea what I was talking about. That they never found Harry and in fact didn't even know Lily and James were dead."

"What do you mean," Pomona started coldly, her usual bright and wide eyes narrowed at the headmaster, her hand inching down to her wand. Filius and Severus had enough of a mind to lean away from her while Poppy and Minerva looked on approvingly. "That they never found Harry?"

"Albus decided it was best to leave the boy outside the muggle's house with a letter telling them what happened." Minerva answered for the man. "He had convinced me that the protective wards would only take place if Petunia accepted Harry into her home of her own accord. Now I see that I should have gone with my instincts and taken the boy far away from them. They were just the worst sort of muggles." The witch spat angrily. Her hair threatened to fall out of its tight bun and her cheeks were tinged a furious red.

With Minerva, Pomona, and Poppy teaming up to let Dumbledore know just exactly what they thought of the situation, no one noticed Severus slipping from the room, a thoughtful grimace on his face.

The next morning, Hadrian was the first of the boys to wake. He took advantage and showered longer than usual for him to make sure he was completely awake and alert. Though there was something to be said about the lack of pressure he was used to at the tower. He wondered how his Uncle Tony would react if he told the man he missed his showers more than his technology.

Hadrian got dressed in his school uniform, making a mental note to thank Bruce for ironing them, opting to keep his robe folded in his bag until he had to go to class. He didn't understand why they were required to be worn in class, seeing them as restricting and unnecessary.

He didn't bother to try to tame his hair and just ran his fingers through it to keep it from getting knotted.

With one last check that he had everything he need in his bag, he made his way down into the common room where some older years were already sitting.

"Never seen a firstie up this early before." A girl of about sixteen with long ink black hair and grey eyes commented to her friend, a pale girl with dark blond hair cut in a short bob.

Hadrian sent her a grin. "Well, if my year mates knew they would be greeted with beauty such as yours, I have no doubt they would endeavor to wake early."

"Snake charmer," she accused.

"At your service, dear lady." Hadrian bent in a dramatic bow, sending the girl and her friend into giggles. He straightened up with a grin. "Hadrian Romanoff."
They introduced themselves as Helena Hoster and Fern Dalton respectively. "The boy who tossed a coin during his sorting." Fern added, her words having a questioning tilt that Hadrian ignored.

"Pleased to meet you." Hadrian said politely. "If you'll excuse me, I'm on my way to eat breakfast. Unless you lovely ladies would like to accompany me?" He added, recalling Professor Snape's rule about going anywhere alone.

Helena seemed to have caught on to his intentions as she stood primly, Fern following her lead. "Only if you give me your arm, sir."

Hadrian held out his arm for her to crook their elbows together before holding his other to Fern who shyly copied her friend. Two third years who had been making their way to the entrance held it open for the three of them, bowing just as dramatically as Hadrian had, smirks on their lips.

"Thank you, kind sirs." Helena drawled while Fern pinked. Hadrian did his best not to laugh at the antics.

Though Hadrian was escorting the girls to the Great Hall, Helena was the one leading them as she didn't want to worry about the first year not remembering how to get the hall. When they reached the hall, the doors were wide open and the students already sitting at their tables had a full view of a first year Slytherin walking with two beautiful upper year girls on his arms.

Hadrian ignored their stares and dropped Helena and Fern off where they indicated, leaving them with a wink. He sat in the same spot as the night before, at the very end of the table closest to the staff table where he had a good view of the majority of the hall.

Hadrian looked around curiously, noting that there were only two other first years already there, the girl from the train, Hermione, he remembered, and a Hufflepuff boy who reminded Hadrian of Draco.

"Whatever happened to good ol' scrambled eggs and bacon?" Hadrian wondered out loud as he looked over all the choices for breakfast. He blinked a bit in surprise when the plate in front of him was filled with exactly what he wanted, along with a glass of milk next to the plate. "Cool. Thanks." He didn't know if the house elves could hear his thanks, but he didn't see the harm in trying anyway.

A small bowl of his favorite flaky and buttery biscuits appearing on the table answered that for him.

"Elves are awesome! Auntie Pepper totally needs one." Hadrian paused, imagining a little slip of a thing following Pepper around excitedly and helping the woman keep Tony alive. He really needed to make that happen.

Hadrian had just stuffed a biscuit with some of his eggs and pieces of bacon - and was drizzling an obscene amount of syrup over it - when he heard someone calling his name. He looked up to see Lisa and Terry walking in together, Terry looking much more put together than Lisa at the moment. They made their way over to him, either not noticing or not caring about the looks they got for sitting down at the Slytherin table. Hadrian smiled brightly at seeing them go out of their way to show they didn't care he was in Slytherin.

"Morning, Coin Toss." Lisa greeted, her voice still rough with sleep.

"How was your first night in the snake pit?" Terry asked with an easy grin. He had taken the seat across from Hadrian while Lisa sat next to him. Terry started piling food on his plate, not seeming to care about what he was grabbing. Lisa was more conscious in her decisions, choosing waffles and sausages, letting out a yawn cracking yawn.
"Not bad. Our Head of House told us what he expected from us and a prefect told us how we should feel about the other houses." Hadrian said before taking a bite of his newly made sandwich. He swallowed the bite before continuing. "Don't worry, you two are to be tolerated."

"Whatever you say, you slimy snake." Terry laughed.

Lisa rolled her eyes. "Professor Flitwick, the Ravenclaw Head of House and Charms Professor, gave us a speech about the rules and traditions, too. He told us to write down any questions about what we didn't understand in our first week and that on next Sunday he would go over them."

"I think Professor Snape expects his Slytherins to find out what they need to know on their own." Hadrian said, reaching for his glass. "A prefect told me that there's a copy of the Hogwarts Charter in the library. I'm gonna copy all the rules down in a journal."

"Why would you wanna do that?" Terry asked around a mouthful of eggs, this time holding his hand in front of his mouth to block the sight.

"He's a Slytherin, Terry," Lisa said. "To break the rules, he needs to know them first. No offense." She added hastily, checking to make sure none of the other Slytherins at the table were listening.

Hadrian waved it off. "None taken. That's exactly right. Well, not break them, per se, more find a way around them."

"You think Snape'll give you points for breaking a rule and not getting into trouble for it?" Terry mused.

"Dunno. That'd be cool, though." Hadrian shrugged.

Lisa looked around the hall. "Have you guys seen Neville? I want to make sure he's okay."

Just then a flood of red and gold came into the hall, rackets the noise level up quickly. Hadrian spotted Neville stumbling behind twin red heads who reminded him of Sirius. "Speak of the devil." He said and waved the chubby boy over.

Neville looked torn for a second, obviously afraid of what would happen if a Gryffindor sat at the Slytherin table, but his want to be next to his friends won out and he made his way over to them. He sat down anxiously next to Hadrian, but when he realized that except for the other Slytherins and few Hufflepuffs no one had noticed where he sat, he relaxed and started to placed food on his plate.

Hadrian was practically beaming at him like a proud father.

"What does that mean?" Lisa asked, distracting Hadrian from the piece of bacon he was biting into. He arched an eyebrow in question. "'Speak of the devil.' What does that mean?"

Hadrian swallowed. "It's a saying. 'Speak of the devil and he shall appear.' It means that someone shows up after you talk or ask about them, like Neville just did."

"So if I was talking about my sister to you and she walked up to us, it would be speaking of the devil?" Lisa looked over her shoulder at the Ravenclaw table where an older girl with Lisa's hair and thick glasses was sitting with her friends.

"I wouldn't put it like that, but essentially."

Lisa nodded and turned her gaze to Neville, who stilled under the attention. "How was your first night as a lion, Nev?"
Neville looked startled, as if he hadn't expected anyone to ask about him. "Oh, um, it was fine. Ron snores, though."

"Did Professor McGonagall give you a welcoming speech? She's the Gryffindor Head of House, right?" Terry asked after finishing off the last of his pancake.

"Uh, no, she didn't." Neville said. "Did you get welcoming speeches?"

"Yeah, basically just telling us to follow the rules. Professor Flitwick told them to make a list of questions they have over the week and Professor Snape told us not to get caught." Hadrian answered casually.

"Not get caught with what?" Neville's brow furrowed slightly in confusion. Hadrian thought he looked adorable when he was confused.

"Does it matter?" He said, getting a laugh from the boys and a huff from Lisa.

Neville looked pensive for a minute before turning in his seat to face Hadrian. "Aren't you, um, worried about being seen with me? I don't think your housemates would appreciate seeing you sitting with a Gryffindor."

"Don't know, don't care." Hadrian said honestly. "If they have a problem with you they can take it up with me. Besides, I happen to have a fondness for cats."
Hadrian trudged into the Charms classroom. His head was doing a decent job of killing him and his nose was so stopped up that he was pretty sure it was the second coming of the Hoover Dam. He hadn't even tried going back to his dorm - he had been fine at breakfast and everyone who saw him would assume he was faking it for whatever reason. So he sucked it up and went to class.

History had been in his favor, being just as boring as ever, and he used the glorified nap hour to check his map before getting some much needed rest. A nap that was especially needed after his heart all but stopped when Professor Binns had called him Harry - it had only restarted when he realized that the ghost wasn't calling any of them by their actual names and he had just been one of the lucky ones that at least got a name that stated with the same letter. Poor Daphne had somehow been pegged as a Velma - and no one understood why that made Hadrian laugh so much.

Those poor, poor uncultured souls.

He couldn't wait until the nerds back home figured out how to hook up iTunes to the mirrors. His housemates would only begin to truly live once they heard the Scooby Doo theme song.

Hadrian shook his head before he got too wrapped up in making a list of iconic and or awesome opening themes to subject his fellow magicals to. But mark his words, he would make sure Will Smith's legacy breached the walls of Hogwarts.

"Hey, Hadrian," Neville greeted, jolting Hadrian from his thoughts. He hadn't even noticed that he had taken a seat next to Neville.

"Hey. How's it swinging?"

"What?"

"Nothing. Inside joke. Don't worry, soon we'll have our own and be able to confuse the masses by laughing everytime we hear the world 'mango'."

Neville looked at him oddly for a few seconds but let it go.

"Hey, what time is it?" Hadrian asked even as he rolled up his sleeve to look at his watch. "Flitwick should be here in about two minutes. Did you finish the homework?"

Neville's eyes widened in panic as he frantically searched his dirt caked satchel, breathing a sigh of relief when he found the slightly rumpled essay. He checked it over quickly and other than the usual ink spots that he always managed to end up with it was just fine. He looked up to see Hadrian having pulled out his weird muggle organizer from his own bag.
"What is that?" Neville finally asked. He hadn't before either because they were talking about something else when he saw it or he couldn't gather the nerve to do so.

"A binder. We used them at my old school to hold our notes, homework, classwork, all that." Hadrian explained, opening his binder to show crisp clean paper with his scrawled notes on it and the out of place looking parchment tucked neatly into the pockets. "Helps keep me organized. Odin knows that Uncle Phil would have a coronary if I lost any of my work."

Neville looks forlornly at the disorganized mess in his satchel. His Gran was always getting onto him about being messy and not having everything in its place. She'd probably be overjoyed - or as overjoyed as Augusta Longbottom was capable of - if he kept things together like Hadrian did.

Hadrian nudged him with his shoulder. "Don't look so down, Nev-boy. It's not like you can get one of these in Diagon Alley or Hogsmeade."

Neville looked between his rumpled essay and Hadrian's work, gathering his nerve. "Do you have an extra I could use? I mean, unless Lisa or Terry want to use it. They are Ravenclaws so I guess - "

Hadrian cut the boy off by slapping a hand on his shoulder. "Relax, Nev. I might have an extra somewhere in my trunk, I can look later if you want. And even if Lisa and Terry wanted it you asked first. Besides, I can - write home and ask for someone to send me the ones I know I have at my house."

"Really? You don't mind?"

"I don't mind sharing my things with my friends, Nev. And if this'll help you not have a heart attack before class starts then it's practically my duty to help you out. And who knows? It might even help you in Potions." Hadrian said with a grin. "And you can return the favor by teaching me about Herbology or Care. Those were always my worst subjects."

Neville brightened at the idea of being able to actually help his friend.

"We have a deal?"

"Deal."

Hadrian barely held back a groan of annoyance when he walked into the Slytherin common room and saw Draco standing a few feet from the entrance, Vincent and Gregory in their usual positions behind him, dull scowls set into their faces. Draco himself was staring down at him even though Hadrian was a good two inches taller than him, a haughty smirk on his lips.

"Well, well, well, if it isn't the secret mudblood," The blond spat out like it was some great revelation. Hadrian immediately got a few disgusted glares from the other Slytherins lounging in the room.

Hadrian sighed. He knew that it had only been a matter of when and where this confrontation was going to happen. Harry Potter may be a half blood from a respected and old bloodline like the Potters, but Hadrian Romanoff was the son of a muggle lawyer with no dad in the picture and was considered a muggleborn. He hadn't lied about his heritage nor had he twisted things around much. No one had directly asked so he hadn't said anything.

"Yes, Malfyoy, my mother is a non-magical. What're you going to do about it?" Hadrian counted it in his favor that Draco had found out first, or at least confronted him about it first. For all his
showboating and boasting, Draco didn't seem to have much in the way of true cunning or cleverness and seemed to be stuck riding on the coattails of his father. His mom would handcuff him to Fury if he tried to act like the Malfoy heir.

Draco sneered at Hadrian's nonchalance, obviously having expected the taller boy to try to lie about his parentage or cower at the reveal. "You and your filthy blood don't deserve to be in Slytherin."

Hadrian tapped his chin as if in thought. "Really? I could've sworn the Sorting Hat placed me here. Maybe it intended for me to be placed in Snuggleworth. Oops, that's a muggle cartoon character." Hadrian bit back a smirk at the sneer on the other's face at that. "I guess the hat really did say Slytherin."

"And that was obviously a mistake. No one with blood as filthy as yours should have ever stepped foot in this house. When my father hears about this-"

"He'll what?" Hadrian interrupted. "Your father has no say in the placement of Hogwarts students, and even if he did, he wouldn't be able to have me placed in another house on the account of me being a muggleborn. If he was in such a position to have any say in my house status, he'd either have to prove me unfit for the qualifications of being a Slytherin or get my permission for a resort."

"How-how do you know that?" Draco sputtered.

Hadrian did smirk this time. "It's in the Hogwarts Charter. Trying to get me resorted because of my blood status would be an act of aggressive prejudice and would automatically be rendered null and void."

From the other side of the common room, Lathaniel was smirking at the first years, already knowing who won. The second Hadrian had asked about the charter, the prefect knew something like this was bound to happen.

"Further," Hadrian continued. "If anyone should be kicked out of the snake pit, I would bet money on you and the Crabby Gargoyle. " Draco's pale face twisted up angrily while Vincent and Gregory looked confused about who the green eyed boy was referring to. "The entirety of our stay here, all I've seen you do is brag about what your father did or said, talk about Harry Potter, and come up second to not one muggleborn, but two, in class. You couldn't even goad Weasley into getting in trouble during our flying lesson and landed yourself in detention because you decided to ignore Madam Hooch and destroy the personal property of another student. Somehow I doubt your father's ever done something as idiotic and Gryffindor as that."

Draco's normally pale face had turned an interesting shade of red as his anger built with every word said. When his words seemed to fail him he whipped out his wand, a hex or jinx at the tip of his tongue. With a flick of his wrist, Hadrian's own wand shot into his hand from his hidden wand holster and he quickly called out the disarming spell, catching the blond's wand as it flew towards him.

"You ignorant mudblood!" Draco exclaimed. "What do you think you're doing?"

"Oh, was I supposed to just stand there while you shot off a spell at me?" Hadrian asked serenely, a direct contrast from the furious sputtering of Draco. "I guess I am ignorant after all."

Draco took a step forward that Hadrian supposed was meant to be threatening, but only made him take a little hop back in teasing. "Give me my wand back, mudblood!"

"Such language in the presence of ladies." Hadrian shook his head in disapproval. "And is that the
only insult you have in your repertoire? Because I have plenty in mine. Of course, I'm mature and... clever enough to insult you without having to fall back on such plebeian methods."

Hadrian turned to their audience, most of which seemed torn about which side to take. On one hand, the Malfoy heir and apparent Prince of Slytherin was getting shut down and his ass verbally kicked. On the other, Hadrian admitted to coming from muggle stock.

"Who wants to bet that the next thing he says will either be calling me a mudblood again or threatening to sic his father on me?" Hadrian stage whispered, managing to elicit a few giggles from Fern and Helena as well as most of the first year girls. Blaise looked much too amused with it all.

Hadrian turned back to see Vincent and Gregory with their wands out, apparently under Draco's orders. Lazily, Hadrian disarmed the two of them as well.

"Is that the best you can do, o' noble Prince of Slytherin?" Hadrian taunted with a mocking bow. "You seem to be unable to do anything except call me a certain name and fail at hexing me. Here I thought I was in a confrontation with the heir of the Malfoy line, but it seems I've been arguing with none other than Filch's offspring."

That earned him a few gasps from their audience and even Vincent took a step away from Draco as if the small boy was contagious. One third year said that he didn't know about Malfoy's father, but his was sure going to hear about all this.

When Hadrian realized that Draco had nothing else to contribute other than glaring harshly at him, he sighed and walked over to where Lathaniel was sitting. The older boy looked at him with an arched eyebrow, but didn't say anything.

Hadrian held out the hand with Draco, Gregory, and Vincent's wands and passed them off to the sandy haired prefect. "I don't care if you give them back right away. I think I've proven I don't have to worry about them."

"Any reason you're not going to keep them until you deem them ready to have them back?" Lathaniel asked.

Hadrian snorted. "And have the little bootlicker try to turn it around on me for having his wand? As if."

Lathaniel nodded and tucked the three wands away in his robes. "You're a strange one, Romanoff."

"It's in my blood."

The fallout from his confrontation with Malfoy hadn't been as severe as Hadrian had thought. True some of the older years had taken to not standing so close to him and he had heard more than a few unflattering comments made about his mother that made his blood boil and his wand hand itch but in all it could have gone worse.

He had no doubt that it would have if not for two things. One, he had gone up against a pureblood heir and Slytherin legacy and won. Two, he was good PR.

He was in the top five in all his classes, his lowest grade being Herbology, he was close friends with the Longbottom and Boot heirs, for the most part he wasn't shunned by the other houses on principle, and he was well liked by the girls in his year - though that last one was a mystery to him.
For nothing else he made Slytherin look good and they could appreciate it. Of course that made it
dangerous for him to be knocked off the top but it also gave him incentive to stay there. And he
could admit it satisfied something petty in him to beat out Malfoy in Potions and Astrology, the
blond’s best subjects.

When he had called home to tell his family about what had happened Sirius had laughed himself
hoarse, Remus and Bruce had congratulated him on standing up for himself, Tony went off into a
spiel about designed magical security cameras so he could catch the next one, Pepper and Darcy had
been in agreement that Malfoy was a brat, Thor thought it was most honorable, and Clint had slid a
ten dollar bill to Loki.

Natasha had cackled.

It made him feel all warm and fuzzy inside. Sirius did warn him to watch out for Lucius Malfoy's
retaliation should it happen which they all believed would. Purebloods as a whole were prideful and
the Malfoys took it a whole other level. It would probably irk Lucius to learn his son had been
embarrassed by a 'mudblood' but it wouldn't stop him from trying to get back at the Romanoff
family.

"Let him try," Natasha had purred.

Terry had laughed as hard as Sirius when he told his friends the next day, Lisa not far behind him.
Neville had given him the same warning about Lucius but once he was assured that Hadrian was
okay he had laughed as well.

The whole thing had gone as well as it could have and now Hadrian was just waiting for the other
shoe to drop.

"Hey, how do you write your essays so fast?" Terry asked, careful not to speak too loud in case he
catched Madam Pince's attention. He was looking at his friend who had already completed the
Transfiguration homework they had gotten and was working on the Charms paper.

Hadrian looked up in surprise. "I just use the Five-Step Process. Don't you?" Terry shook his head,
along with Lisa and Neville.

"Is it one of those things you learned in your muggle classes?" Lisa asked.

"Yeah. I mean, it's something I learned in elementary school, but every class with essays used it."
Hadrian said.

Terry was looking at him with a considering expression. "Could you teach us?"

"Sure, it's not that hard. It's just a guideline to help kids structure their essays better." Hadrian pushed
his own work aside and sifted through his bag, pulling out a few sheets of notebook paper and a
pencil. His friends at first didn't understand why he brought nonmagical supplies with him, at least
until he had shown them how much easier it was to write with a pencil and correct their mistakes. He
still turned in his homework on actual parchment so no one could say anything even if they wanted
to.

Hadrian quickly explained the Five-Step Process, writing a mock essay about grilled cheese
sandwiches to show them how it was supposed to go. Neville had the most questions about the
revision step, but they all understood the basics of it.
"Can we use some of your paper and pencils to write out rough drafts with? Unless you don't want to run out faster than you intended." Neville hastily added in case Hadrian didn't want to have buy more paper.

"It's fine. Paper is cheaper than parchment, so it doesn't really matter. In fact..." Hadrian trailed off as he looked through his bag. His friends shared a look over his head at his constant use of the Bag O' Wonders as they had taken to calling it. Hadrian had referred to himself as Mary Poppins when he had produced an umbrella at one point, something that went over their heads.

Hadrian handed each of them something. "Here. They're spiral notebooks. They have lined paper so it's easier to write and you don't have to worry about a bunch of loose papers."

Lisa ran her hand over the dark blue notebook she had been handed. Suddenly she stood up and ran around the table to pull Hadrian into a hug.

"It's just a notebook." Hadrian said, confused.

"It's not just a notebook. Do you know how much easier this will make everything? And as long as we write the final draft with a quill and parchment, the teachers won't say anything! Your pencils and pens are so much easier to write with, too." Lisa rambled excitedly.

Hadrian rolled her eyes. "You're such a Ravenclaw."

She pulled back from the hug with a huff. "Oh, hush, you slimy snake." Hadrian laughed as she returned to her seat and opened her notebook. He waited until she looked a bit lost before placing a handful of mechanical pencils in the center of the table. He ignored the glower she sent him.

"This is great and all, Gran'll be proud if my homework grades go up," Neville sighed. "But what about the practical grades? I can barely get the easy spells, and that's only after at least twenty tries."

"Maybe it's your wand?" Terry offered. The others turned to look at him in question. "What? Nev's always shaking his wand like he's trying to get something out of it. He even looks at it funny sometimes." The tall boy defended.

Lisa reached over to take Neville's hand, making him sputter and flush. Lisa ignored that, along with Hadrian and Terry's snickers. "Did Ollivander say anything about your wand when you got it? You might just need to clean it properly to make it work better for you."

"Yeah, mate, my dad spent three days teaching me how to polish my wand. He said that wands can actually break on you if they're not taken care of properly." Terry added helpfully.

Neville shook his head. "I didn't get my wand at Ollivander's. Gran gave me my dad's, said it was to honor his legacy. I should be proud." By the time he was finished speaking he looked completely heartbroken and ready to retreat in on himself.

"No." Hadrian said with authority. Neville's head shot up at the tone, his eyes wide. "I don't know what your Gran was thinking when she gave you your father's wand, but I'm inclined to believe she wasn't thinking of anything except herself."

Neville gasped at the insult.

Hadrian held up his hand to stall any defense, weak or not. "I know she's your Gran and you love her, and that's fine. But that doesn't mean she's not messing with your education out of some strange idea that you're honoring your dad by using his wand. First, ever heard of 'the wand chooses the wizard?' You can't just pick up any wand willy nilly and expect it to work perfectly. Second, your
dad's still alive, isn't he?" Neville nodded slowly, shock still on his face. Lisa rubbed his hand comfortably.

"Then that wand really won't work for you." Terry took over. Hadrian leaned back to let him at it. "If your dad's still alive than the wand's still connected to his magical core and won't fully bond with another's, even if it was that witch or wizard's match. You can't cast easily because the wand's rejecting you, mate."

Downcast, Neville looked down at the wand in his hand. "What am I supposed to do? Gran'll be upset and disappointed if I tell her I want my own wand. And even if she agreed, how am I supposed to get a new one?"

"Don't worry, Nev," Terry said reassuringly. "We'll all write to your Gran and tell her how important it is for you to have your own wand. She can't say no to a Gryffindor, two Ravenclaws, and a manipulative Slytherin." Terry dodged the hit from Hadrian with a laugh. "Just kidding, mate."

"Yeah, and I'm sure once you get permission from your Gran, McGonagall won't mind allowing you to go to Diagon Alley. She might make you wait until a Hogsmeade weekend, but it's better than not at all." Lisa added, squeezing Neville's hand lightly. He sent her a thankful look.

"And if all else fails, when we leave for the holidays, I'll sneak you out to the alley myself. If there's one thing my uncles Siri and Clint live by it's better to seek forgiveness than to ask permission. Won't even need to go to McGonagall." Hadrian said happily.

Terry added eagerly, "We'll just stow you away in his trunk to hide you from your Gran until it's too late." Hadrian and Terry shared a glance before breaking out into evil cackling at the same time, making Lisa roll her eyes and mutter something about boys.

Someone clearing their throat caught their attention and they turned to see Hermione Granger standing off to the side of their table, three heavy books in her arms, and looking at them sternly. "I don't know what you're planning, but you shouldn't be trying to go behind the professor's back." She informed them primly.

Hadrian stared at her in incredulity before looking around the library and even under the table. "Nope, no cameras. What are you talking about?"

Hermione glowered at him in a poor imitation of McGonagall's harsh stare. "I heard you talking about not going to Professor McGonagall for something, which obviously means you need her permission for something. I don't know what it is, but it's not right for you to corrupt poor Neville and get him into trouble."

Hadrian kicked at Terry's shin when he saw the boy open his mouth, then Lisa's when she looked prepared to take over for their friend.

"Look, Granger," The girl's eyes narrowed at his tone and use of her last name. He didn't care, she had been rude first. "No one's corrupting anyone over here, and no one's going to get in trouble. Instead of trying to lecture us you should focus more on not eavesdropping."

"I wasn't eavesdropping, Romanoff," Hermione sniffed. "I just overheard you while I was getting a book from the shelf.

"Yeah, eavesdropping." Hadrian said obviously. Behind him he heard Lisa stifle her giggles and Neville cover his own laughter with his hand. Terry laughed outright.
Hermione shifted her stance, one word away from stamping her foot. "Since you obviously can't be trusted not to break the rules, I'll be telling Professor McGonagall about this. You'll thank me when you don't end up hurt or in trouble from whatever you were planning."

Ignoring the looks and sounds of disbelief at her statement, the bushy haired girl turned on her heel and marched away from them, apparently intent on going to Professor McGonagall as soon as possible. Hadrian debated calling her back and explaining the situation but figured she'd either think he was lying to save himself or not care at all. Besides it wasn't his job to appease her.

Hadrian shook his head at her. "Doesn't she know that you're not supposed to warn the people you're tattling on? For all she knows we really were planning something bad and now we have a chance to get our stories straight."

"She seemed to take offence to you calling her Granger." Lisa pointed out.

Terry snorted. "She took offence to a Slytherin calling her Granger."

"Isn't she muggleborn, though? Why would she already hate Slytherins?" Lisa asked.

"I remember Ron and a few older Gryffindors telling her how evil and dark Slytherins are after Dean was warned by Seamus to stay away from them. Dean didn't seem to buy it, though he did listen about the pureblood supremacy a lot of them have, but Hermione seemed horrified by the stories." Neville explained, sending an apologetic look at Hadrian who waved it off. It wasn't as if Neville was lying.

"Whatever her problem is, I hope she gets over it soon." Lisa said before changing the subject. "We should finish our homework than write that letter to Nev's Gran. There should be a few books on wand crafting and lore that we can use, too."

Hadrian rolled his eyes. "Stuck up Ravenclaw."

"Slimy Slytherin."

"What color's your underwear today?"

"Hey!"

Minerva McGonagall looked up from the papers she was grading when she heard a sharp rapping at her office door.

"Come in," she called, her wards telling her it was one of her cubs.

The door opened to reveal Hermione Granger, a first year who was quickly making a name for herself in class. Her hair was even frizzier than usual and she seemed almost out of breath, clutching tightly at the thick books she held against her chest.

Minerva set down her grading quill. "Yes, Miss Granger?" She asked with a gesture for the girl to take a seat. After she was seated, Minerva continued. "Is there something I can help you with?"

"Yes, professor." Hermione straightened her back. "I was in the library when I overheard four students planning to go behind your back and one of the student's guardian's back about something. I didn't hear what it was, but when I approached them about it one of them told me they were going to do it anyway and that he didn't care if he got the others in trouble. I even told them I was going to tell
you about their troublemaking, but they just ignored me." The girl managed to ramble out in one
breath.

"I see," Minerva took off her glasses to massage the bridge of her nose. "And do you know the
names of these students?"

Hermione took a moment to think. "One of them is Neville Longbottom, it's his grandmother they
were going to behind. I don't remember two of them, but I know they're in Ravenclaw and also first
years. The last one is the one who said he didn't care if he got them in trouble. His name's Hadrian
Romanoff, from Slytherin."

Minerva paused at the names. Neville Longbottom was a bit of timid boy who hadn't made any
friends in his own house, though he was often seen with Lisa Turpin and Terry Boot of Ravenclaw
and Hadrian Romanoff, the peculiar muggleborn Slytherin. None of them had shown any sign of
being troublemakers in the two weeks since the term had started and Hadrian was rumored to have
helped Neville in their potions class.

Of course, Hermione had also shown that she was one to follow the rules and had a clear respect for
authority, so Minerva wouldn't just dismiss her out of hand.

"Thank you for informing me of this, Miss Granger. I'll be sure to speak to them."

Hermione nodded. "I knew you would listen, professor."

"Is there anything else I can help you with?" Hermione answered in the negative and left after
thanking Minerva for listening to her.

Minerva decided that whatever is could wait until the next day at breakfast where she knows they'll
all be sitting together and she won't have to search the castle for them. It had been a sight to see that
first morning when she spotted the four first years sitting together at the Slytherin table, acting like
they didn't have a care in the world and seemingly oblivious to the looks they were garnering. It had
raised questions with everyone, even those who usually ignored gossip. The four hadn't been
childhood friends - Hadrian lived in America and Neville had been a withdrawn child who isolated
himself - so it wasn't that they had just simply refused to let house rivlary get in the way of their
friendship. By all accounts they had only just met on the train ride to Hogwarts, certainly not long
enough to develop a bond that wouldn't be outweighed by years of tradition.

Then again Minerva knew that Hadrian was a muggleborn and while he appeared to get along well
enough with most of his housemates it wouldn't surprise her if he was hesitant to get to close to them
in fear of what would happen if his heritage was made known. For him to make and keep friends
with students from other houses wasn't such a surprise with that in mind. And Neville was much of
the same, being friendly enough with those in Gryffindor but not necessarily being particularly close
to any of them - though this was born from lack of mutual interests and a rather shy demeanor that
wasn't common in the house of lions. She couldn't speak much about Lisa or Terry, not knowing
them or their situations - if they had any - very well outside of what she saw in her classroom but it
seemed to be as simple as them not caring much about it. To them Neville and Hadrian were their
friends and that was that.

The most surprising thing about the whole affair was the lack of ire Hadrian had to deal with over
being friends with a Gryffindor. Truly she had only heard of Draco Malfoy and Pansy Parkinson
taking offense but they had been ignored. She didn't try to dwell on it too much, the intricacies of the
workings of the Slytherin House was something she had long since decided she'd rather remain
ignorant of.
Placing her glasses back on, she turned her attention to the essays she had assigned the third years, shaking her head at some of the answers. Honestly, she had no idea where Aaron Dale got the idea about a man turning into an eight foot tall green giant.

- "We should study outside by the lake today." Lisa said as she passed the syrup to Hadrian. "It's really nice today and I want to see if we can get a glimpse of the Giant Squid."

Hadrian poured the syrup liberally over his scrambled eggs. "Sure."

"I know a spell to keep your things from blowing away in the wind." Terry said, after swallowing the food in his mouth at Lisa's pointed look. "It'd suck to finish our potions work and have it blown into the lake."

"I'm in. I'll get too cold to be outside soon." Neville added, taking the syrup from Hadrian and drizzling it over his waffles and bacon. Lisa had bemoaned the day she noticed that Neville had picked up Hadrian's habit of putting syrup on everything at breakfast. She was almost certain there was more syrup than blood in their veins by now.

Terry cut through his sausage with his fork. "I heard that Hagrid named the squid Marvin, so he might come if we call his name."

"I'm sure Hagrid would be happy to help you in your endeavor should you ask, Mister Boot." Terry nearly choked on his sausage when he heard Professor McGonagall's voice come from behind him. He slowly turned in his seat to find her looking down at him with something akin to amusement.

"Hello, Professor McGonagall." Hadrian greeted politely, nudging Terry to do the same. Lisa and Neville did so as well without encouragement. "Is there something we can do for you on this fine morning?"

Lisa kicked Hadrian under the table. "Stop trying to charm a professor, Romanoff!" She hissed at him. Neville would later swear that McGonagall's lips twitched into a smile briefly while Terry would testify that she let out a full blown laugh at their antics.

"Actually, I would like all four of you to meet me in my office after breakfast. I need to speak with you about something that has been brought to my attention." Professor McGonagall said seriously. After receiving a chorus of 'yes, professor' McGonagall nodded curtly and walked off.

Neville turned to his friends worriedly. "What do you think she wants with us?"

"Granger must've kept her promise and tattled on us to the professor." Hadrian said, not seeming all that worried about it. When asked, he simply pointed out that they hadn't done anything wrong. "By the way, Terry, did you finish the letter for Nev's Gran?"

Terry nodded. "Yeah, it's on my desk. I can get it later so Nev can send it off."

Seeing that Neville was looking nervous again, Lisa pulled him close to her. "Don't worry about, Neville. Your Gran won't be upset, and if she is, she'll get over it soon when she sees how much better you perform with your new wand. And if she still doesn't, my grandmother on my mom's side is senile and would happily take you in as her grandson." She assured him.

"Come on, let's go explain things to McGonagall." Hadrian said, standing up. The others followed his lead, Terry gulping down the last of his pumpkin juice. Hadrian grabbed a napkin as they walked away and thrust it into his hands without a word.
When the four first years piled into McGonagall's office, she nearly laughed when Neville, Lisa, and Terry pushed Hadrian forward, obviously choosing him to be the spokesperson.

"Neville needs a new wand." Hadrian stated before the professor could get a word out.

"Mister Longbottom's wand seems perfectly fine to me," Professor McGonagall inquired, arching a thin eyebrow in a way that reminded Hadrian of his auntie Pepper. He wondered if it was a natural ability or if it was something born from being exposed to the likes of Sirius Black and Tony Stark.

"Mister Longbottom's wand is perfectly fine, the problem is that it's in the hands of the wrong Longbottom," Hadrian answered purposely vague, wondering if she would make the connection on her own.

McGonagall turned her gaze to Neville, who seemed to be trying to hide behind the much smaller Lisa. "Would you please explain to me why you are in possession of your father's wand, Mister Longbottom?"

Lisa stepped to the side, leaving Neville to the professor's mercy. He stood up straighter under her stare, but still avoided looking her in the eye. "My Gran told me that I didn't need a new wand when I could use my father's. She said it's a sign of my pride and respect for him and what he stood for."

"Of all the-" McGonagall cut herself off before she ended up saying something she shouldn't in front of the students. Hadrian and Terry looked disappointed. "And I assume that you all were planning for a way to get Mister Longbottom his own wand when you were overheard and misinterpreted by a fellow student?" She asked, though it wasn't really a question.

Hadrian shrugged while the others made murmurs of agreement. McGonagall sighed.

"We wrote a letter that we're going to send to Nev's Gran to convince her to get him his own wand." Terry piped up.

Lisa nodded, adding, "Yeah, and when she agreed we were going to approach you to see if you could let Neville go to Diagon Alley. That's what we were talking about in the library. Hadrian was joking about sneaking Neville off to get his wand if you and his Gran said no when Hermione came up and told us that she was going to tat-um, tell a professor that we were planning something."

The room was filled with a heavy silence for several long moments as the students waited for the older witch's verdict on the situation.

"There seems to be only one thing for me do to," McGonagall said seriously. "Mister Longbottom, give me your wand."
"-and then she fire called Nev's Gran and started telling her how irresponsible it was of her to force Nev to use someone else's wand! She was waving the wand around and starting saying something else, but she went full Scottish Brogue so I didn't catch it, but it got Madam Longbottom to agree to let Nev a new wand of his own. McGonagall says that she'll take him to Diagon Alley on a weekend so he won't miss any classes. Terry tried to get himself invited along so he could stop by Flourish and Blotts."

"Seems like you're having quite a time there, Hadrian." Remus smiled.

Hadrian grinned widely. "Yeah. Auntie Pepper said she was sending my course work next week so I'll have to work that into everything but there are a lot of free periods here."

"Are you going to share your textbooks with your new friends? I recall you saying Lisa and Terry telling you to take them with you if you came back." Remus said.

"Yeah. I asked them a few days ago if they still wanted to take the classes I did and Neville is getting dragged along for the ride." Hadrian nodded. "Terry's good at study planning so maybe I can ask him to draw up a time table so none of us get behind on the schoolwork here. It shouldn't be too hard though, like I said we have a lot of free periods. The only probably will be that they'll need a crash course to get up to the same grade I am."

"I assume Pepper has already thought of that and is sending the necessary items as well?" Hadrian nodded. "Well that's good. Oh! Tony wanted me to ask you if you were planning on continuing your music lessons."

Hadrian took a moment to think. "Yeah. I want to keep up with guitar and violin. Between doing the work for two schools, working out, and those two I should be able to keep busy."

Remus nodded. "Might I suggest you find an abandoned classroom for all this? You could clean it up yourself or ask a house elf and work on your course work and music lessons there so you won't be bothered. You could probably do some of your exercises in there, too."

"Hey, you think I could get away with riding a bike everywhere?"

"I doubt it's expressly against the rules, though a few of the professors might take issue with it." Remus tried to sound stern, but came up short thanks to the smile threatening to break out.

Hadrian shrugged. "We can go through my copy of the charter again and check out the list of banned items."

"Be careful, or that Granger girl might tell on you again." The werewolf teased.

"Ugh, don't remind me." Hadrian groaned. He still didn't understand what the girl's problem was. "Normally I would try to get her back, but nothing bad came out of it and Neville's getting his wand
sooner than we thought so..."

Remus laughed outright at his godson's annoyance. "Well, I'm glad you're not out for needless revenge. Glad to see you learned something from the Marauder Age." He said with a hint of regret in his voice.

"But no promises if she tries to get us in trouble again for no reason." Hadrian warned.

The older man arched his eyebrow. "And if there is a reason?"

"Then we were stupid enough to get caught and deserve the punishment." Hadrian shrugged, unrepentant.

Suddenly Remus was pushed out of frame and Clint's face appeared, an excited look on his handsome face.

"Hey, Bright Eyes, you'll never believe what happened."

Hadrian rolled his eyes. He couldn't count how many times someone said that in the Avengers tower. "What? Did the Big Guy turn purple? 'Cause if he did, I reserve the right to call him Jellybean."

Clint looked thoughtful for a moment, undoubtedly picturing that scenario, before he shook his head. "No, Loki, Sirius, and Nat went to have a... talk with the goblins at the British bank about your inheritance and everything."

"That all? 'Cause I totally believe that happened." Hadrian said.

"No, no, no, it's what happened after they were able to prove that Nat and Sirius are your legal and magical guardians." Clint paused for dramatic effect, knowing it was something that irritated his nephew. Before Hadrian could yell at him to continue, he started speaking again. "A bunch of legal mumbo jumbo, stuff about papers and documents and investments, and something about you needing to go to a Gringotts branch to gain physical access to the vaults, and then Loki did what Loki does best."

"Uncle Loki does what he wants." Hadrian deadpanned.

Clint smirked. "Exactly. And apparently what he wanted was to have the backing of the entire Goblin Nation."

Hadrian fought to keep his jaw from dropping. "What? I read that it's almost impossible to get the backing of a Goblin Clan, never mind the whole nation. What did he do?"

"Don't know if you noticed, kid, but with us, impossible don't mean a thing." Clint pointed out. "And what he did was set up a trade system with the guys from Niedermeyer. Apparently in Britain, and a few other places wizards, have banned goblins from living above ground, making their own investments in human stocks and companies, just generally not being allowed to interact with non-goblins outside of the banks."

"First, it's Nidavellir. Second, don't the goblins control the majority of wizarding currency? Who thought it would be a good idea to piss them off and then give them all their money?" Hadrian asked in disbelief, shaking his head. "I would ask if Uncle Loki got what he wanted, but you wouldn't be this excited if he didn't."

Clint laughed. "I don't know, I look forward to the day that the famous Silvertongue fails."
"So why did he want the Goblin Nation on his side? As far as I know he doesn't have a vault with them. I don't even think he has money, really."

"Huh, me either." Clint agreed. "Anyway. He said that it's better to be prepared and if something goes wrong with you over there, like if they find out your birth name, Loki wants to have all the leverage we can get."

Hadrian pictured the school finding out who he used to be and trying to get something out of him and Loki just snapping his fingers, freezing all their accounts until they leave him alone. The thought made him smile, especially because it was completely possible, though with Loki it would probably involved more grandstanding and theatrics.

"May I speak to my godson now?" Remus cut in exasperatedly, though he sounded amused as well.

"Sure thing," Clint handed the mirror back the to werewolf. "I'll just go see what Bruce is up to." He added suggestively before disappearing from view.

Remus was flushed slightly as he turned his attention to his laughing godson. "I don't want to hear it."

"Alright." Hadrian agreed. Then he started mouthing 'Remus and Bruce, sitting in a tree', making his dogfather's face and neck go completely red. Remus growled threateningly, but choked on it when Hadrian got to 'baby in a baby carriage."

"I blame Sirius for this." Remus groaned.

"Why? Thor was the one who asked if it was a Midgardian custom to look at the behind of someone walking past when he caught you looking at Uncle Bruce." Hadrian happily reminded the man.

Remus cleared his throat. "That may be, but it's too hard to really stay mad at the guy. Sirius, on the otherhand, was the one who proposed to Bruce in my stead."

Hadrian laughed loudly at that. Bruce and Remus had avoided each other for two weeks after the incident until Tony had had enough and locked them in an elevator.

"Back to what we were talking about before we were so rudely interrupted," Remus paused to glare around the room even if Clint was gone. "How excited is Neville to get his own wand?"

"It's like his face can't decide if it wants to smile or turn red. Terry's been lecturing him on proper wand care and Lisa wrote up a list of the spells we've learned in class for him to review when he gets his wand." Hadrian shifted in his bed and peeked out between the curtains to check on his roommates. Theo was still snoring like a bear and Blaise had thrown off his comforter and spread out the width of his bed. It was nice to see that even stuffy purebloods slept like idiots. "I think once he sees how much easier it'll be with his own wand, he won't be as nervous as he is. Except in Potions. I don't think he'll ever not be nervous with Snape sneering over his shoulder."

Remus sighed. "I don't know what Severus' issue is. He used to hate everything being a bully stood for and now it seems like that's what he's become. I'd hate to see how he'd treat you if he found out who your dad is."

"Eh, let the bat be miserable. I'll just have to get Lisa and Terry to help me make up for the confidence drop after that class." Hadrian shrugged.

"Have you had any luck finding the original Marauder's Map..."
"Are you ready?" Terry asked.

Neville stood across from his friends in the unused classroom. Dust covered desks and chairs had been moved to the side with the promise of being cleaned later so the floor was open and bare. Lisa had applied a cushioning charm to the floor as precaution. All of their assigned work had been completed and filed away and since they had no classes that day they had left immediately after breakfast.

In Terry's hands was the list of spells they had done in class as well as the various spells he, Lisa, and Hadrian had picked up on their own time. Their goal for the day was to help Neville master as many spells as he could - their goal for the weekend was to have him master them all and possibly then some.

Neville wasn't quite as confident in the plan as his friends were but he didn't want to not at least try his best before giving up and proving he just wasn't very good at this. He took a fortifying breath.

"As ready as I'll ever be."

"Okay," Terry said. "I'm thinking we should start with Charms then move on to Transfiguration and finish up with Defense before we work on the ones we learned outside of class."

"Since you still managed to do the spells with another's wand it shouldn't be that hard for you to catch up," Hadrian pointed out. "Think of it as a refresher course instead of a remedial lesson."

Neville nodded even though he didn't exactly know what Hadrian was talking about.

Hadrian clapped his hands together, "Alright, let's get this show on the road. First up, *Lumos*!"

A bright light flashed throughout the room, blinding all four first years.

"Hadrian!"

"Whoops."

"Who can tell me what the Pleasant Smell Charm is?" Flitwick asked, his beady eyes looking around the room.

Hermione's hand shot into the air, nearly whacking Parvati in the face in her haste to be the first. No one else bothered to raise their own hand, not wanting to deal with her glowering darkly at them if they got called on or her smug grin if they go the answer wrong. They had learned early into their lessons it was just best to leave the girl be.

"Yes, Miss Granger?" Flitwick called when it was obvious no one was going to attempt to answer.

"The Pleasant Smell Charm is a beginner's charm meant to fill the air with a pleasant aroma of the caster's choice. *Rosarum*, for example, is the incantation used when one wishes to use the scent of roses." Hermione answered primly.

"Exactly right! Very good! Two points to Gryffindor." Flitwick chirped. "Now for the practical today we'll be using the very charm Miss Granger gave as an example. A simple jab and swish while saying *Rosarum*, emphasis on the first R. To be sure that you've done it correctly and aren't smelling
the fruits of someone else's labor I'll be handing out special cloths that will change colors when the Pleasant Smell Charm is used on them."

Hadrian turned to Neville as Flitwick passed out the small white cloths. "You, sir, have an unfair advantage."

"What? What do you mean?"

"I mean that the Herbology prodigy is going to do a charm based on the smell of a plant. Galleon says you get it on the first try." Hadrian bet with a grin.

Neville blushed but rolled his eyes. Flitwick passed by them and place two cloths in front of them, giving them a reminder of the wand movement as he did so. Once the professor finished handing them out - and after having a startling revelation at the fact that he could've just used magic to pass the cloths out - he instructed them to try out the spell.

Neville his wand tightly in his hand before taking a deep breath and relaxing his grip slightly. 
"Rosarum," he intoned, jabbing his wand at the cloth on his table. He watched in amazement as the scent of roses wafted up to his nose and the cloth changed from plain white to a red befitting of a Gryffindor.

He stared at the red cloth with wide eyes. "No way."

"Way to go, Neville." Hadrian clapped his friend on the back, drawing attention to them.

Neville was the only one to get the spell right on the first try - though Hermione seemed to have gotten it partly right as her cloth was speckled with red. Seamus had managed not to set his cloth on fire but the same couldn't be said for his robes.

Flitwick bounded over to inspect Neville's work and beamed at the boy. "Perfectly done, Mister Longbottom. And on the first try! Five points to Gryffindor!"

Neville flushed heavily under the praise and ducked his head to get away from the stares of his classmates. He looked up when Hadrian nudge him and saw that the green eyed boy was smiling happily at him.

Neville smiled back.

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It had started with Dean asking Neville where he got his binder and ended with a group made up of Dean Thomas and Seamus Finnigan of Gryffindor and Mandy Brocklehurst and Morag MacDougal of Ravenclaw joining Lisa, Terry, Neville, and Hadrian in the library.

They all got along well enough and Neville was happy to find that he wasn't as friendless in Gryffindor as he thought he was.

"Can someone read over my potions essay? I don't want to lose any more house points for misspelling a word again." Neville asked shyly, holding out his practice paper.

"Mandy, can you do it?" Lisa asked her friend. "I'm helping Dean with his penmanship."

Dean sighed and threw down his quill, getting a laugh from Seamus at that. "Why can't you guys get
with the times and use pens?" He rubbed his hand where the quill he had been working with had indented into his skin.

"Obviously, the wizarding world uses quills so that when you deplorable muggleborns come into our society, it's just another thing we are better at than you. Can't have none of you thinking you might be equal with us, can we?" Lisa sniffed arrogantly, sounding much too like a bigoted pureblood, her head tilted up so she could look down her nose at Dean.

The group froze at her words before breaking into raucous laughter, earning a stern shushing from Madam Pince and a few odd looks from the other students in the library.

Seamus' face had gone red and he had to take several deep breaths to calm himself. "Merlin, Lees, you sounded just like that ponce Malfoy."

"I blame Hadrian. He's infected her with his snakiness and whatnot." Terry teased, throwing his arm around Hadrian's shoulders. "I'm sure that Mandy and Morag would agree with me. Lisa used to be such a sweet and wholesome girl. Then Hadrian got his fangs into her and now look, she's pitching to be the next Lady Malfoy."

Morag glared mockingly at Hadrian, her face twitching and threatening to break into a large smile. "My da warned me 'bout blokes like you, usin' your charm and such to enthral good girls like Lisa. Bloody snake, you are." Her resolve broke and a grin spread across her face.

"So you're saying I'm charming?" Hadrian grinned, not looking the least bit offended. "You're not so bad yourself, for a stuck up eagle and all."

On cue Morag, Mandy, and Lisa threw wadded up pieces of parchment at him, two of them hitting him in the face. Hadrian sputtered indigantly.

Mandy giggled before changing the subject. "Come over here, Nev, we can go through your paper together."

With a pointed look at Seamus, who grumbled but stood up and switched seats with Neville anyway, Mandy cleared the area in front of her, grabbing her favorite red pen to mark any errors. She pretended not to hear Seamus call her Professor Brocklehurst under his breath.

Neville slid into his seat and nervously handed his paper to Mandy to go over.

"Did any of you get Charms Through The Ages by Agnes Beauregard?" Morag asked as she looked over the compiled books on the table. "Su said she wants to go through it to look for household charms that Flitwick doesn't really go over."

"Nah, but I know where it's at. I remember dropping it on my foot while trying to get another book." Seamus said.

Dean glanced up from his work. "Where is Su? I thought she wanted to be in the study group, too."

"And Padma." Neville added.

"Su's with Yesenia Castillo," Lisa answered. "Yesenia's a muggleborn fifth year who helps new muggleborns get acquainted with the wizarding world. Since Su's the only new muggleborn in Ravenclaw this year, she gets a few one on one meetings with her. And Padma's spending the day with her sister."

Terry let out a frustrated groan. "Professor Quirrell is completely useless. Why would Professor
Dumbledore hire him to be the Defense teacher? I swear the man's afraid to pick up his own wand in case he gets a splinter."

"I know," Hadrian agreed. "It's getting to the point where I'm honestly worried that we'll still be casting shields until the end of the year. I know a good defense can be the best offense, but it's getting ridiculous."

"Hopefully we won't be stuck with 'im next year, if the curse holds." Morag said casually.

"Curse?" Dean asked, setting down his quill again.

Morag nodded. "Yeah, 'parentally there's been a curse on the Defense post for a while now. No one makes it past their first year teachin'. Dumbledore says it's rubbish, but that don't explain why he hasn't kept a Defense teacher for more'in a year for over fifty years."

"Why don't they just bring in a Cursebreaker or change the name? Instead of Defense Against the Dark Arts, they could just call it Defense like everyone does already." Terry suggested. His dad hadn't mentioned anything about a curse, but he could've just not believed it or just plain forgotten about it. "Unless it's on the room itself, then they could just change rooms. There's plenty hanging around."

"People 'ere like tradition." Morag said with a shrug. "It's good in some cases, but sometimes it's irksome to have new ideas shot down 'cause 'that's not how it's been done for years."

"If it ain't broke, don't fix it." Dean quoted absentmindedly.

Terry noticed Hadrian staring down at the table with a pensive expression, a small frown working at his face. "What're you thinking, Hadrian?" He asked, getting the attention of the others.

"I'm thinking I need to check out the Hogwarts Charter again, see what it says about student run clubs." Hadrian answered.

"Huh? Why?" Terry looked confused.

Seamus' face lit up with realization. "Oi! You're thinkin' about starting some kind of defense club, aren't you? Self-taught and all that."

Lisa looked thoughtful. "That could be a really good idea. There's plenty of unused classrooms we can use and as long as we get a professor's permission we should be fine."

"We'll probably need the help of the upper years." Neville pointed out. Mandy had finished marking through his essay and there were a lot less red marks than usual for him.

"Yeah, no one's gonna trust a bunch of firsties to teach themselves hexes and jinxes." Terry added. "But I don't think that'll be too hard to do. I know the older years in our house would love a study group."

"Gryffindor would probably help, too. They love a chance to show off. Bloody show ponies." Morag said with a teasing grin that showed off her slight gap at Dean, Neville, and Seamus.

"So it's agreed," No one had noticed when Lisa and Mandy had pulled out a notebook and were writing down ideas. "Hadrian will go through the charter because he's a slimy snake and will find a loophole if need be." Hadrian stuck his tongue out childishly at Lisa. "The rest of us can ask the older students if they would help out. Then we can go to one of the professors about officially starting a club so we don't get in trouble."
"Flitwick would probably be our best bet. He's a dueling master, isn't he?" Hadrian said. "And he'd probably be excited about-"

"Excuse me." The odd group of first years turned around to see Hermione standing a few feet behind them, looking at them strangely.

"Need something 'Mione?" Seamus asked before anyone else could think of something to say.

The bushy haired girl glowered at him. "It's Hermione. And I noticed that you have the book I need to finish my paper for Charms," she pointed at the thick book on their table, nearly hidden Hadrian's bag and Lisa's untidy pile of scratch paper. "Would you please hand it to me?"

Hadrian looked around the table. "Is anyone using it or about to use it?"

Neville weakly nodded his head. "I, uh, was going to start on Charms after someone checked my other work. But she can take it, it's fine." He added hurriedly.

"Thank you." Hermione said primly and walked over to practically snatch the book off the table, as though someone was going to try to stop her. Without another word she stalked off to sit back at her own table.

Hadrian turned back to Neville who was picking at the dirt under his fingernails. "You didn't have to do that, Nev. She could've waited a bit longer."

"It's fine. She won't need it that long."

"She was a bit rude about it, wasn't she?" Mandy noted with a hint of confusion.

Terry shrugged. "She's probably still upset that we didn't get in trouble with McGonagall when she tattled on us. It'll be worse when she hears about Nev going to Diagon Alley for his wand."

"She tried talking to Neville in the common room." Seamus added. "Telling him that he should just own up to what he did and not let 'that Romanoff boy' get him in trouble. Nev just looked at her like she was crazy."

"I think she means well," Neville said, earning himself a few incredulous looks from the others. "She's just not good at going about it right. I might have been able to convince her we weren't doing anything wrong, but Ron jumped in when he heard I was still hanging around a Slytherin and somehow the two of them got in a fight about something or other."

"I still say-ah!" Hadrian jerked back suddenly, falling out of his seat and to the floor. His right hand flew up to his left shoulder and felt something warm and thick coating it. He didn't have to pull his hand back to know that it was coated in blood.

"Hadrian!" Surprisingly Neville reached him first despite having been at the other side of the table. His face pale and his eyes were wide in shock. "What happened?"

Hadrian tried to say something but all he could get out was a wet sounding cough. Dean kneeled down next to him, pulling off his sweater and holding it to the wound. Hadrian distantly heard Terry calling for help and the girls frantically trying to remember any healing spells they heard about.

"What is all this ruckus about- dear Merlin!" Hadrian tilted his head back against the floor to see an upside down Madam Pince holding her hands over her mouth in shock. "What happened?" She demanded.
Neville was shaking, but managed to be heard over the overlapping explanations from the others. "We, we d-don't know. He ju-just f-fell and star-started bleeding." Tears started to run down the chubby boy's face.

"One of you needs to run ahead to notify Madam Pomfrey about this." Madam Pince ordered. "Mister Thomas, keep doing what you're doing. We don't need him losing anymore blood and I'm not confident in my skill at healing spells to risk anything."

Morag stood on shaky knees. "I'll go. I'm the fastest." Madam Pince nodded at her and then she was gone, nearly knocking over a fifth year who was walking into the library.

"Mister Romanoff," Madam Pince lowered herself the ground next to Hadrian's head and brushed the sweat slicked hair out of his face. She let out a small gasp. "Mister Romanoff. Hadrian! I need you to open your eyes."

Slowly, green eyes were revealed. "Wha? Mom?"

"Hadrian, do you know where you?"

Hadrian groaned and shook his head to clear his mind. "H-Hogwarts library."

"Good. Good." Madam Pince looked up at the panicked and worried first years. "You should all sit down. We don't need anyone working themselves into a tizzy and collapsing."

Before anyone could follow her suggestion or challenge it, the library doors slammed open hard enough to bounce against the wall, the sound reverberating throughout the room. Severus Snape stalked in powerfully, his robes billowing around like moving shadows. His dark gaze went over the shaky first years, the worried form of Madam Pince, and finally the bloodied form of one his snakes.

Terry would later swear that Snape hadn't actually walked over to them and instead had soundlessly and without notice apparated right in front of them because of how fast he appeared next to them, no matter that no one can apparate on Hogwarts grounds.

"What happened?" Snape asked with a guttural growl.

"The children say that he suddenly fell back with the wound. I didn't see any light from spell casting and no one had their wands out when I arrived." Madam Pince answered easily, not one to be quelled by the man's glare.

Snape sneered at the cowering Neville. "Why am I not surprised to find one of my Slytherins injured, and surrounded by Gryffindors?"

"Hey! We didn't do anything to him!" Seamus yelled at the professor, his face flushed with nerves and anger.

"Why don't focus more on your bleeding student than picking on a bunch of kids!" Lisa added.

There was a faint note of surprise in Snape's face briefly before it disappeared. With a dramatic flourish of his robes that seemed almost instinctive, the potions professor knelt down by his student and cast a basic diagnostic spell over him. Confusion pulled at Snape's downturned lips.

"Sn-Professor Snape?" Terry said cautiously. "What's wrong with him?"

Snape, however, didn't answer, only stood up with a severe look on his face, his dark eyes flickering down at Hadrian.
"Move aside! Move aside, please!" As one, the first years and Madam Pince turned to see Madam Pomfrey pushing through the small crowd that had gathered, Morag following anxiously behind her. Snape was too focused on whatever the diagnostic showed him. Pomfrey paused when she saw just what sort of state her patient was in. His blood had seeped through Dean's sweater and had pooled on the floor, his skin had paled and was glistening with a feverish sweat. Hadrian was clenching his jaw tightly in an effort not to bite down and through his tongue. "Merlin!"

Pomfrey rushed to her patient's aide, her wand out and a healing spell already on her lips. Just as she reached the Slytherin, Hadrian's eyes suddenly opened and he arched his back as pained scream escaped him.

"Mom!"
Severus watched as Madam Pomfrey carefully checked over his student's body to find the cause of the sudden and bloody injury. He knew that her much more extensive diagnostic of the boy showed the same thing his rudimentary one did.

That Hadrian wasn't injured.

Despite the plain to see wound in the small shoulder, the blood trickling out of the injury, the obvious pain that had been on the boy's face, every diagnostic spell cast showed that there was nothing physically wrong with him.

The results had sent Pomfrey into a tizzy as she did everything she could to figure what was wrong, constantly going between healing the stubborn the wound that would just open up when she turned her back and flipping through the books she kept in her office for some kind of answer.

Hadrian himself laid in the bed closest to her office so she wouldn't have to waste time going all the way to the other side of the infirmary as she flitted back and forth. After he had fallen unconscious from the pain while being moved from the library to the hospital wing, Pomfrey had spelled one of Severus' pain relief potions into his stomach to keep him from having a fretful sleep. His sweaty fringe had been swept back away from his face by an almost mothering Lisa before she and their friends were ushered out of the infirmary. With his face clear of his messy bangs and his thick rimmed glasses, Severus could see the beginnings of a strong jaw and an aristocratic nose.

Severus turned when he heard the infirmary doors slam open. He saw Dumbledore, Minerva, and Filius stalk into the room, curiosity, determination, and grimness on their respective faces.

"Ah, Severus, my boy," Severus resisted the urge to sneer at the headmaster at the address. "I came as soon as I was able. How is the boy?"

Pomfrey answered before the dour professor could say something cutting to his employer. "He's as best as he can be at the moment. With the oddity of the diagnostic spell results not being any help, I've had to consult my archive of injuries and was able to compare it to a familiar wound." The healer walked to the side of Hadrian's bed and felt his forehead with the back of her hand, a concerned look on her face. "It's a stab wound, made by a short, curved blade that was twisted while still inside the flesh before being pulled out roughly. I haven't found any sign of infection, though he does have a fever that has yet to be broken and I'm worried about the amount of blood he's lost. I was just about to give him a blood replenisher."

"Have you found any indication as to what's caused the diagnostic spells to fail?" Filius asked while the others digested the information.

"Not yet. And that worries me." Pomfrey admitted. "I've yet to find any mention of a dark spell that interferes with healing spells the way his wound seems to be doing, though I have found a small passage about a rare poison that feeds off the magic of healing spells to grow stronger and more
persistent. The only way to overcome it is to either let it run its course and hope the victim is strong enough to make it or to overload it with as much magical energy has possible."

The healer pulled the thin sheet away from Hadrian's body and peeled away his unbuttoned shirt to show the painful injury in the boy's shoulder. The blood flow had slowed, allowing a look into the jagged tear in the flesh. Pomfrey gently touched the edges of the wound, earning a painful grimace from Hadrian, making her and Severus worry. The pain reliever was wearing off.

Pomfrey turned to the disgusted Minerva whose eyes were glittering dangerously. "If I can't find a magical solution to this soon, I'll have to employ muggle medical practices. His wound will need to be cleaned and stitches will need to be applied."

Minerva nodded in understanding. "He's muggleborn so he won't be too confused about it when he wakes up if it comes to that."

"Has anyone contacted his parents?" Filius piped up.

"Now, I don't see why we need to bother the poor boy's mother with something like this when we still don't understand what's happening." Dumbledore said with a genial grin. Severus scowled. "It would do nothing more than worry her as she won't be able to enter Hogwarts with the wards in place."

"We could always contact his magical guardian," Filius replied, not one to be placated by barely there arguments. "Unless his magical guardian is Severus, though I distinctly recall Mister Boot telling Miss Brocklehurst about Mister Romanoff's magical uncles. I've no idea if they're related by blood or not, but it would explain why he isn't as confused as some other muggle-raised students."

Severus answered when he saw Dumbledore open his mouth to say something else. "I have looked through Romanoff's files and it seems that his magical guardian's identity is confidential. We'll need either permission from his mother or their account manager at Gringotts." A vicious smirk appeared on Severus' lips. "I would very much like to see any of you try to convince Ragnok into giving you information on another's accounts."

Filius let out a squeak at the name. "Surely you don't mean to tell me that the Head Goblin is the boy's account manager? How ever did he manage to curry enough favor for that honor?"

"I believe that is something you'll have to ask the boy when he awakens, provided that he chooses to give you an actual answer." Severus' words reminded the smaller man that they were speaking about a Slytherin, a muggleborn Slytherin who had broken a tradition that had spanned back since the founder's time simply by getting placed in the snake pit, but a Slytherin nonetheless.

"If we sent word to the boy's mother, could she not simply inform this mystery magical guardian? She must know who it is." Pomfrey pointed out helpfully from where she was dabbing gently at the injury with a clean rag.

Severus wondered if perhaps the formidable healer had in fact been a member of his house back when she had attended Hogwarts. The short, knowing smile she sent his way only had to the thought.

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Clint looked down at his partner in crime and justice from where he was stationed in the rafters.

Her dark red hair was splayed out on the sterile white pillow under her head and she was glaring at the nervous Remus and Bruce as they moved around the room in anxious movements. She started
muttering harshly in Russian when Loki walked into the room with an indifferent expression on his face.

A dark eyebrow rose elegantly on the god’s face. "My, my, someone has a dirty mouth."

Natasha only spat something at him in Russian, clearly not using any words she would allow her son to repeat.

"I don't need All-Tongue to know she just told you to shove something up your ass." Clint said as he jumped down from the rafters, landing next to Natasha’s bed.

Loki didn't say anything to that. "Yes, well, apparently I've been demoted to being the Widow’s messenger."

Natasha narrowed her eyes at the words. "What message?"

"A letter sent by owl was delivered to Tony's house in London where the house elf there sent it through to him by the charmed PO Box.” Loki explained, and with a flick of his wrist a folded sheet of parchment appeared in his hand. "It is addressed to the 'legal and magical guardians of one Hadrian C. J. Romanoff' from Hogwarts professor Filius Flitwick, a reputable duelist and goblin descendant. It holds... disturbing information."

The tall god handed the letter to the curious Clint who read through it as he walked back over to Natasha’s bedside to show her the parchment. His face lost color as he read and he hesitantly handed the letter to the glowering assassin in bed.

Natasha read the letter quickly before clenching her small hands into angry fists and crumpling the parchment. Her bright green eyes darkened and glittered dangerously. Even with his reflexes, Clint barely had time to dodge the balled up parchment Natasha threw to the side as she forced herself up and out of the bed.

The letter had been straight to the point, informing her that her son had been mysteriously injured while studying in the library with his friends and at the moment they had no leads as to what happened. It had explained that the wound was stubbornly refusing to heal, despite the school's on site healer doing her damndest - and that the headmaster had been reluctant to inform her of the situation so that she wouldn't worry. Filius had no such compunction and had written to her as soon as he was able.

"I'm going to see my son, anyone have a problem with that?" She growled out, looking at each of them dangerously even as she hunched slightly from the pain.

Bruce and Remus had the presence of mind to just nod along with her before turning to finish preparing the healing potion they had started for her. The others could faintly hear the two men mutter to one another about 'this will draw out the poison' and 'this is made with essence of dittany.'

"I thought non-magicals couldn't enter Hogwarts 'cause of the wards?" Clint asked, directing his question more towards Remus and Loki.

Loki arched his eyebrow. "I doubt that even those wards would keep out a determined Black Widow." Natasha smirked viciously and victoriously. "And even should they hold under her assault, Midgardian wards have no such affect on me." Loki said imperiously.

"I'll go start up the Quinjet." Clint said in reply before quickly leaving the room.

Natasha turned to Loki. "Why won't you just heal me?"
"I would have had I known you would allow it. Now," the sorcerer answered. "The effects that it will have on young Hadrian are unknown so I'll shall leave it to the beasts."

Without a word, Remus pointed his arm behind him with his wand in hand, the tip glowing a bright purple.

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Terry reached over and pulled Lisa's hand away from her mouth from where she was biting her nails. She glared at him, but kept her hands down.

"He's gonna be okay, right?" Dean asked worriedly. He was staring down at his hands even though the blood had been washed away.

After Dean, Lisa, Mandy, Morag, Neville, Seamus, and Terry had been kicked out of the infirmary by Snape and an equally frightening Pomfrey, they had moved through the halls in a daze until they wound up in the Ravenclaw common room.

Lisa's older sister, Leanne, had seen the tear stains on her sister's face and rushed over to find out what happened. Lisa managed to explain that Hadrian was in the hospital wing through her sob induced hiccups before burying herself in Leanne's chest until she managed to calm herself. Now Lisa and Leanne sat shoulder to shoulder on the floor against the navy blue couch that Mandy, Morag, Neville, and Seamus had piled on to. Dean and Terry had pushed the marble coffee table away to sit right next to the Turpin sisters.

Leanne nodded reassuringly, her fingers running through Lisa's hair comfortingly. "Yeah, he'll be just fine. Madam Pomfrey's one of the best Healers in the British Isles. The only reason she's not at St. Mungos or anything is because she refuses to work anywhere except Hogwarts. She loves it here and would do anything for the students, including Hadrian."

"I still don't understand what happened." Mandy said in a small voice, almost as if she was afraid to speak. "There weren't any spells cast. No one was near enough to cast one and none of us even had our wands out."

"Maybe someone Disillusioned themselves and snuck up on him?" Morag offered hesitantly.

Terry shook his head. "Hadrian would've noticed. He's freaky like that. He even caught the Weasley twins trying to sneak up on him to prank him. Said that they had nothing on his uncles."

"Hey, Nev, you okay?" The others turned their heads at Seamus' question. Neville was sitting between Morag and Dean, his knees drawn up to his chest, his skin an unhealthy pale, and his eyes were bloodshot and swollen from crying. His lips were moving minutely, but no sound was coming out and none of them could understand what he was mouthing to himself.

"Nev?" Seamus tried again. The chubby boy didn't seem to notice.

"Neville," Morag shook his shoulder slightly, startling the boy enough that he jumped back and knocked the back of his head against Dean's chin. "Oh! Sorry!"

Dean rubbed his jaw. "Damn, Nev, you shouldn't have been worried about flying lessons. Your head's hard enough that the ground would've been more hurt than you." Lisa and Morag glared at him as one, making him shrink back partly. He may be a Gryffindor, but no amount of bravery would have him go against the two protective witches. He preferred his nose on his face where it belonged, thank you very kindly.
Lisa stood up from her sister's hold and placed herself in front of Neville, bending over slightly to look him in the eye. When he tried to avert his gaze, she grabbed him by his chin and made him look at her. "What's wrong, Neville. And don't you dare try to play it off as unimportant."

Neville somehow folds even more in on himself and hides his face in his bent knees. "It's just..."

"Just?" Lisa prompted gently, not wanting the shy boy to retreat in on himself.

"He looked... he sounded like- he reminded me of my parents." Neville managed to get out before tears started to fall again and his body shook with silent sobs.

"Oh, Nev," Lisa pulled him into her arms, holding him as tightly as she could manage while trying to keep her own tears back. She didn't know what he meant exactly but for it to remind him of Hadrian on the floor, bleeding and crying out for his mother, it couldn't mean anything good.

As Lisa murmured comforting words to Neville and Morag and Dean leaned into the attached kids to offer support, Leanne watched it all with a broken proud smile.

Terry's head snapped up just as the common room door slammed open to reveal an out of breath fifth year with Hadrian-level messy hair.

"Simon, what's the matter?" Leanne asked.

"Someone's here." Simon gushed. "A pretty woman with red hair and this really tall guy dressed like a Slytherin. Miles and I were out in the courtyard and saw them approach. Miles went to find Headmaster Dumbledore or another professor."

"It has to be about Hadrian." Terry said with certainty. He stood up quickly, nearly tripping over his own robes in his haste. "Lisa, stay here with Nev until he's good to go. I'm gonna go check out whoever's here."

Seamus and Dean stood up too, Mandy following right after. "We're going, too."

"We should just head to the infirmary if this is really about Hadrian." Mandy pointed out. "That's where'd they end up anyway and this way we don't have to worry about someone locking the door before we get there."

Lisa moved to take Dean's spot, her arms still wrapped protectively around Neville's body. Morag rubbed Neville's shoulder affectionately.

"You go 'head. Lisa and I'll hold the fort down."

With a nod, the other first years took off.

Natasha took one look at the castle and immediately declared it not good enough for her son.

*Old school magnificent with an air of majestic mystery* - it meant nothing when someone had to sneak a letter out to inform her that her son had been injured. Dumbledore should hope that she came across her son first because she wasn't sure she would be able to hold back from strangling the man with his own beard.

She hoped Hadrian had gotten his fill of Hogwarts because this was going to be his last day.

As she stalked towards the castle entrance, Loki trailing behind her with a sense of anticipation, she knew that she wasn't going to be leaving without leaving a trail of chaos in her wake.
Marigold Pollock stared down at the missive sent to her from her Head of House through one of the school's house elves.

Marigold had been sitting in one of the leather arm chairs in the Slytherin common room with a copy of Witch Weekly, enjoying her weekend when one of the school's house elves appeared in front of her and held out a folded parchment to her. It popped away as soon as it was in Marigold's hand.

She looked up when she heard someone come through the entrance and saw Lathaniel walk in along with the sixth year prefects Elyan Farlowe and Imogen Lanning and the seventh year prefects Alton Sheehan and Emily Bulstrode. They all had identical missives in their hands.

"Took you long enough," Marigold commented.

Lathaniel rolled his eyes. "You don't even know where we were when we got these." He pointed out. "Did you call for a house meeting?"

"Of course I did," Marigold huffed and flipped her golden hair over her shoulder. "What sort of Hufflepuff do you take me for?" Lathaniel knew she knew what to do in this situation and wouldn't wait around for someone else to remind her and make her look stupid. Sometimes she would swear he said things like that just to annoy her.

Lathaniel ignored her. He knew how Marigold was, she had been the same way in their first year and the only difference now was that she was taller and had more spells at her disposal. He took his usual seat to the right of her, putting him in direct sight of anyone entering the common room while also placing him just out of the light of the fireplace so that shadows flickered over his face. He had fought Marigold long and hard for the right over the intimidating seat.

The other prefects shared a look but opted out of commenting. They were well used to how the fifth years acted. They all figured it was just a matter of time before the two killed one another or got caught in one of the broom closets.

Elyan and Imogen took their seats on the far left of Marigold, allowing them to see whoever came down from the dorms while Alton and Emily sat between the sixth and fifth years.

Slowly but steadily the rest of the Slytherins filtered into the common room. They broke off into set groups, mostly based on year, gender, and political standing. The higher the year the smaller the group as they already had years to form alliances and also had those years to spite others in their quest to get to the top of the Slytherin hierarchy. The seventh years generally had no more than three to a group while the first years, divided they may be, usually stuck together in situations like these.

Lathaniel searched through the crowd of impassive faces for a particular first year. Draco Malfoy was standing just behind Vincent Crabbe and Gregory Goyle, doing his best not to draw any attention to himself the way he used to. The blond still hadn't recovered from the humiliation of
losing to the muggleborn Romanoff and was constantly having to balance throwing his father's reputation around while making it seem like he wasn't just riding on his father's coattails like Romanoff had accused just to keep himself from being at the bottom of the first year hierarchy alongside Millicent Bulstrode and Malfoy's own bodyguards.

When Lathaniel had returned Malfoy's wand to the small blond after informing Professor Snape of the incident, the boy had seemed uncharacteristically subdued. The prefect had guessed that being beaten so easily and thoroughly at the hands of someone he had been raised to believe was inferior to him had bruised his ego a bit. It didn't help that any support he would have had from other Slytherins who shared his belief disappeared the second Malfoy's wand ended up in Romanoff's possession.

Lathaniel didn't know if Malfoy had written home to his father about the confrontation, though he was sure that the witnesses to the incident had informed their own families. With all of Malfoy's boasting about his father and his position in the Ministry, Lathaniel doubted the blond would be in any hurry to tell his father about how he lost in a confrontation with a muggleborn, one he had initiated no less. Though Malfoy Senior would no doubt find out from his associates that had children in Slytherin and then Malfoy Junior would have to explain why he didn't see it fit to inform his father himself. Damned if he did, damned if he didn't.

"Oi, will you get on with it already? Some of us have things to do!" Marcus Flint called out, baring his crooked teeth.

"Yeah, like stare at Wood's ass in his Quidditch uniform," Marigold muttered under her breath. The other prefects hid their laughter well, though Elyan made an odd choking noise that had Flint narrowing his eyes at the fair boy.

"However much I dislike agreeing with Flint, would you mind telling us why we've been called here?" Helena Hoster said lazily, ignoring the glower she got from the Quidditch captain.

Tracey Davis hesitantly raised her hand. "Is this about Hadrian?" Her question got confused looks from the other snakes and Lily Moon's eyes got especially wide.

Malfoy on the other hand perked up. "Who cares about the stupid mudblood?"

As one, Davis, Moon, Daphne Greengrass, and Millicent Bulstrode turned to glare the small boy into submission, Bulstrode cracking her knuckles for added effect. However, Malfoy seemed to have regained some of his former confidence with the absence of Romanoff.

"Did my father get him kicked out? I don't care what the mudblood says, no one like him should be in our house," So the blond had written home to his father. Judging from the way he spoke, Lathaniel was almost sure that the first year had twisted things in his favor.

"Oh, shut up, Malfoy. Everyone here knows that Romanoff's more of a Slytherin than you are." Moon snapped.

Malfoy's face filled with color. "You stupid bint! That mudblood shouldn't even be allowed in Hogwarts!"

"Why? So you won't have to come up second to him in class like you do now?" Greengrass drawled with a smirk. "Of course, while we're at it, Granger should be kicked out as well. Doesn't she beat you in test scores as well?"

"At this rate we should just expel anyone who does better than Malfoy in any class. That'll leave just Weasley and Crabby Gargoyle over here though." Bulstrode added. Lathaniel noticed Emily looking
at her cousin with veiled approval, though they all knew the girl was wildly exaggerating. "After all, it's not like Malfoy actually does anything to bring his standing up. He just reminds everyone who his parents are and hopes the teachers give him a passing grade on that alone."

By now Malfoy had gone entirely red in his face and was edging closer to purple with each word. Before the blond could say anything, Greengrass spoke again.

"Please don't explode on us, Malfoy. I'm sure Filch won't appreciate having to clean up his son's remains." The girl said with a sniff as she leaned back into the chair she and Davis had managed to claim as their own.

Lathaniel let a smirk appear on his face as he realized that the first year girls were purposefully reminding Malfoy of everything Romanoff had said to rile the boy up even more. Apparently none of them appreciated the comments made about the handsome and intelligent Romanoff who had endeared himself to them just by not being an idiot like Crabbe and Goyle or constantly boasting and showboating like Malfoy.

To the side of the girls, Theo Nott and Blaise Zabini were watching it all without saying anything, though Nott did have a smile on his face.

Malfoy opened his mouth to finally defend himself, but was once again cut off by Greengrass. "Hush and let the prefects speak. We actually want to hear what they have to say."

Alton stood up, drawing attention to himself and stalling any response Malfoy had. Lathaniel absently wondered if the blond was going to burst if he didn't get a chance to run his mouth soon. "Yes, Davis, this is about Romanoff."

"Well, what happened?" Flint asked impatiently.

Alton's eye twitched minutely. "Well, if everyone would let us speak, you'd know that, now wouldn't you?" He glanced at the first year girls who just met his gaze evenly. The seventh year sighed. "Anyway, as most you don't know, Romanoff is in the infirmary being treated for a stab wound."

Hoster narrowed her eyes dangerously. "What do you mean he's being treated for a stab wound?"

"Exactly what he said, Hoster. Romanoff has a stab wound in his shoulder and something's interfering with the healing spells." Lathaniel explained.

"Who hurt him?" Fern Dalton's voice cut through the low murmuring of the snakes.

Pansy Parkinson snorted. "Who do you think? Those idiotic Gryffindors he's always hanging around with."

"Yes, the lions decided to stab him after he helped bring their grades up and told Malfoy off for breaking Longbottom's Remembrall." Zabini commented sarcastically, not paying any attention to the sneer Parkinson directed at him. "And do you really think they'd still be walking around and not potion ingredients if Professor Snape even so much as thought they were responsible for hurting a Slytherin?"

Marigold snapped her fingers to get everyone's attention. "Are you all done?" she questioned with an arched eyebrow. "Good, now there are two reasons for calling this meeting."

"The first," Elyan started. "Is to inform the entire house of the incident so that no one is caught unawares should a student from another house try to use this information to their advantage, as well
as let you all know to be on the look out for anything suspicious in case this isn't an isolated event and someone's targeting the Slytherin house." He looked over all of them to make sure they understood.

"And the second, and unofficial reason," Imogen took over smoothly. "Slytherin is the house of cunning and ambition. We are also the house of retaliation. Even including certain... political and personal beliefs, I doubt any of us would allow such direct and violent attack on a Slytherin to go unpunished."

Vicious smirks and knowing smiles appeared on nearly every Slytherin's face, first to seventh year, regardless of any affiliation. Lathaniel didn't even bother to hide his own smirk. If they allowed this to go unpunished, the other houses might see this as an opportunity in their advantage to attack the divided house.

Lathaniel absently noted that Hoster and Dalton were sharing particularly cruel smiles.

"Make your plans, gather the troops, and raise hell."

Dean, Mandy, Seamus, and Terry burst into the infirmary triumphantly and then fell over themselves when their tired legs gave out.

Dean and Seamus slumped against one another, the Irish boy noticeably much more out of breath and sore. Mandy and Terry had managed to fall on top of each other in a sprawled heap and were trying to detangle their respective prepubescent gangly limbs from one another.

"Maybe I should join Hadrian for his morning jogs." Dean muttered under his breath as he pushed himself off the ground. He reached out a hand to help his pale friend up as well seeing as Seamus seemed to be having trouble figuring out which way he was supposed to bend his knees.

Terry finally managed to pull himself free from Mandy and stood up, looking around the spacious room. He spotted Hadrian on the bed closest to Madam Pomfrey's office door, sound asleep, a thin sheet covering him.

"And what do you think you're doing?" Madam Pomfrey asked as she suddenly appeared from her office with a large book open in her hands. She hurried to Hadrian's side, looking between him and whatever passage she was reading with a frown.

Dean saw the chance and walked over to Hadrian and Pomfrey while doing his best to look like he belonged there so she wouldn't kick them out too soon. Mandy and Terry quickly caught on and dragged Seamus after him.

"Do you know what's wrong with him, Madam Pomfrey?" Dean asked, casting a worried glance over Hadrian's sleeping form.

Pomfrey sighed. "No. I thought I had figured something out earlier, but that theory fell through so now I have nothing to work with." The healer paused before looking at the upset students. "You all were there when it happened, right?"

"Yeah, saw the whole thing and still don't know what happened." Seamus answered while the other three nodded along.

"Would one you mind telling me exactly what happened? Even if you don't know what happened, you might have seen something that could help me figure this whole thing out." Pomfrey said.
"I can tell you. I was watching Hadrian at the time because he was talking about something." Mandy said. Pomfrey nodded and ushered the girl into her office to get a better account on what exactly happened in the library.

Seamus and Terry pulled a few chairs over to the side of Hadrian's bed so they could all sit while they waited for the mystery visitors.

"Who do you think it is?" Seamus asked, aiming the question more towards Terry.

The Ravenclaw shrugged. "I know his mum's a muggle so she won't be able to get through the wards. But some of his uncles are wizards and two of them actually went here so it could be them. And I think at least one of his aunts is a witch."

Dean's eyes widened. "Really? I guess that explains why he knows so much about Hogwarts even though he's muggleborn and American."

"Do you know their names?" Seamus asked. "His wizard uncles?" he clarified.

"Uh," Terry thought for a moment. "He's mentioned a Remy, Tony, Clint, Siri, Loki and Phil From what I know, he has a pretty big family that's always around him so it doesn't surprise me that he doesn't remember to name all of them. I'm pretty sure he has nine uncles and four aunts, plus his mom."

Seamus let out a low whistle. "They put the Weasleys to shame. Is he the only kid or something?"

Terry nodded. "Yeah. His aunts and uncles don't have any kids, or at least Hadrian hasn't mentioned any."

"I'm surprised he's not even more spoiled than Malfoy," Dean commented.

"I think he is spoiled, just not like Malfoy." Terry shrugged. "Like, sometimes he gets a little confused or annoyed when he remembers that Hogwarts doesn't have the same classes that his old school did or he says something when he sees me or Lisa write out a letter to send home with an owl instead of doing something called texxing,"

"Texting," Dean corrected automatically, well used to doing it because his mother seemed incapable of pronouncing it right. "It's a way to send instant messages through two cell phones."

"Yeah, that. It's like he's spoiled in that he's so used to different things." Terry finished.

"At least he's adapting better than some." Dean said. "I only do as well I do because Seamus and me sat on the train together and he knew most of what I was confused about because his dad's a muggle."

Seamus opened his mouth to respond when they heard the doors open. They turned their heads as one to see who had entered.

They spotted Professor Dumbledore and Snape first, standing apart drastically thanks to the difference between Dumbledore's deep blue robes with small yellow stars dotted all over them and Snape's usual outfit of only black. Dumbledore looked his usual genial and amused self while Snape managed to not only glower even more fiercely than standard, but also somehow seemed to be snarling without making any noise.

Dean elbowed Seamus in the ribs to get his attention and nodded in the direction of the people who had arrived with the professors.
A tall man with slicked back black hair and a handsome face dressed in dark greys and Slytherin green stood to the side of Snape, looking every bit the poised noble that Malfoy wished he could be. He didn't seem to notice or care about the irritation he was causing Snape, and in fact looked amused with the whole thing. Dean couldn't help but think that this man was every Slytherin's dream.

Next to him was a petite woman with shocking blood red hair curled up to her shoulders and a determined look taking over her pretty features. She was wearing tight dark wash jeans and form fitting maroon tank top covered with a leather jacket. Even though she was physically the smallest of the four, her presence was larger than anyone else's.

The woman looked around the room until her eyes landed on Hadrian's sleeping form. With a literal growl she stalked over to the eleven year old's side, her fierce scowl making the conscious first years scramble out of her way.

Pomfrey's office door opened and the healer and Mandy stepped out, both pausing when they saw the newcomers.

"Guys?" Mandy directed towards Dean, Seamus, and Terry who looked just as confused as she did.

"Miss Romanoff, do you really think-" Dumbledore started placatingly.

"Do I really think I want to be my injured son's side? Damn straight." The woman cut in angrily, making the first years and Madam Pomfrey blink.

"You're Hadrian's mum?" Seamus blurted out.

She turned to him with a raised eyebrow that was oddly familiar.

"Oh, yeah, that's Hadrian's mum alright. He must've learnt that eyebrow thing from her." Terry said without thinking.

The tall man appeared next to Hadrian's mother, an amused smirk on his lips. "It seems your infamy has breached even these walls." His voice was smooth and rich and seemed to fill the room.

"Uh, ma'am?" Dean said nervously, having to fight the urge to gulp when familiar bright green eyes turned on him.

"Yes?" The woman trailed off.

"Dean. Dean Thomas, first year Gryffindor." Dean introduced himself. "This is Seamus Finnigan, he's in my house. And that's Terry Boot and Mandy Broklehurst, they're both in Ravenclaw." He pointed to them in turn.

"I'm Natalie Romanoff and this is Loki Skywalker," She smiled prettily as she gestured to the handsome man next to her.

"Is your name really Loki?" Mandy asked with a tilt of her head.

Loki gave out a low chuckle, making the eleven year old girl blush at the sound. "Yes, it is my real name. I'm quite fond of it actually."

Mandy pinked even more. "Y-yeah."

Natalie smacked Loki's arm in rebuke for making a young girl embarrassed. Loki didn't look in any way chastised though, sending a wink in the boys' direction. Natalie rolled her eyes and turned back
to Dean. "What was your question, Dean?"

"Well, Hadrian's a muggleborn, right? That means you're a muggle." Dean started nervously. "So how did you come here? I thought there were wards that kept muggles out so the school won't be discovered."

"Yes, I would like to know as well," Snape drawled, drawing focus to himself in the process. His glower had fallen into an irritated scowl and his arms were crossed over his chest.

Natalie only smirked. "Family secret."

"You're a muggle, you can't have family magic." Snape snapped at her.

"I said family 'secrets', not 'magic.'" Natalie pointed out. She didn't say anything more on it and Snape looked ready to snarl.

"Excuse me, Miss Romanoff," Pomfrey spoke up.

Natalie smiled softly, a direct contrast to her earlier fierceness. "Please, call me Natalie. I presume you're Madam Poppy Pomfrey?" The red head held her hand out for the older woman to shake.

"You know the names of the staff?" Dumbledore's voice reminded them all that he was also in the room.

"I wouldn't send my son to a school in another continent unless I learned all I could about it first. Madam Pomfrey is noted in several magical healing books back in America. She's regarded as one of the best pediatric healers in the British Isles and several articles written by American witches and wizards cite her own work as a source." Natalie praised, making Pomfrey flush and stammer a bit.

"I fear that your trust in me is unwarranted in this case," Pomfrey sighed heavily. "I've been unable to heal your son and it's only thanks to Professor Snape's pain relief potions that he's in any sort of comfort."

Natalie moved over to the head of Hadrian's bed and ran a hand through her son's messy hair. "It's not your fault. Hadrian's uncles are currently looking into it, but I feel you should know that when Hadrian was young, he formed a magical bond with me. We didn't know the extent of it until now."

Loki stood off to the side while Natalie spoke, drawing her audience in with each word, all the while gazing down at Hadrian and carding through his sweat slicked hair. No one noticed when his large hands began to glow a soft green and he began to chant in a foreign language under his breath.

"What do you mean, Miss Romanoff?" Dumbledore asked lightly, his twinkling blue eyes shifting between the woman and her son.

"I wouldn't go as far as to say that my son and I share every injury that one of us receives, but it seems that when one of us is critically wounded, the bond acts up." Natalie sounded weary.

Seamus looked confused. "You were hurt?"

Natalie nodded and shrugged off her jacket, showing the sterile mesh bandage taped to her left shoulder. Blood that had seeped through the bandage stood out against the bright white of the material. Pomfrey gasped and scurried to the younger woman's side and cast a diagnostic spell, letting out a sigh of relief when she actually got results.

"What happened?" Terry asked in a hushed voice.
"I work as a lawyer, mostly in the non-magical world, but I've expanded my services to the magical world as well. I tend to defend the non-magical relatives of witches and wizards who might otherwise not have the resources for a proper defense. As you can imagine, in the magical world and out, people who lose their cases tend to be a bit angry." Natalie didn't say anything more, letting them draw their own conclusions. She noticed out of the corner of her eye that Loki had finished and gave her a discreet nod.

"We were going to have her healed back in America," Loki said before anyone could try to ask anything. "When we received word from one of your professors that young Hadrian had the same wound as his mother. Since we don't know much about the bond between the two of them, we didn't want to risk anything and thought it best to come here so they could both be treated."

Dumbledore nodded sagely. "Yes, well, I think it would be best if we reconvened in my office to discuss things. I'm sure that I can be of service in your trying to understand whatever bond is between Mister Romanoff and his mother."

Natalie and Snape glared at the old man in sync.

"My son's health is first priority here." The green eyed woman said harshly. "We can talk after Madam Pomfrey has healed us."

Pomfrey was sending her own glower at the headmaster for trying to interfere in her healing of two patients, a scowl that had the first years taking a step back.

Loki resisted the urge to cackle.
Hadrian slowly came to awareness. He kept his eyes closed, feeling out with his other senses to try to figure out where he was.

He was laying on a soft, but firm mattress, his head elevated by pillows that reminded him of the kind his Uncle Bruce used. There was a faint humming in his ears, the kind he only heard when there was no other sound wherever he was. Knowing that he was at Hogwarts, the Hospital Wing most likely, he guessed that someone had done a spell so he couldn't hear anything.

Deciding that sooner or later someone would check on him and realize he was awake, Hadrian allowed his eyes to flutter open. The hurtful bright of the room confirmed his suspicions about being in the infirmary. He glanced around and saw Lisa and Neville sound asleep on the bed next to his, Lisa cuddled into Neville's side and Neville's mouth open, a bit of drool collecting in the corner of his mouth. Terry was knocked out in a large sitting chair next to Hadrian's bed, curled up into a ball and looking quite small for a boy his height.

Hadrian spotted Madam Pomfrey fretting about something to his Head of House and nearly smiled at the familiar worry of medical staff.

"Hello? Professor Snape? Madam Pomfrey?" Hadrian called out to get their attention. When they didn't show any sign of hearing him, he started waving his hand in the air to catch their attention.

Snape noticed him first. With a flick of the man's wand sound returned to Hadrian and the first thing he heard was Neville's snoring.

"Mr. Romanoff," Snape's baritone brought Hadrian's attention to him.

"What happened?" Hadrian's throat felt scratchy and he reached for the glass of water on the night stand.

Before Snape could answer, Pomfrey was at Hadrian's side, her wand waving through the air. Hadrian tensed slightly, but managed to relax once he saw it was just the school healer. "Hadrian, how are you feeling?"

Hadrian held up his left arm and moved it in a circular motion. He winced slightly when the movement made his shoulder ache. "It feels like I pulled something, but other than that it feels just fine."

Pomfrey nodded. "Yes, well, because your mother doesn't have a magical core I could only give her so many healing potions for her shoulder and I didn't want to spell another pain reliever into your stomach without you being conscious. Would you like one now?"

"No, it's fine." Hadrian shook his head then regretted it when it sent a wave of lightheadedness through him. "It'll go away soon, and if it doesn't I'll come to you or Professor Snape for that potion."

Pomfrey hummed in answer, not surprised at the answer. Muggleborns tended to be wary about magical healing, and even after they got used to the idea, shied away from them because of the taste. Though one muggleborn wizard had once commented on the fact that at least potions didn't lie about being cherry, something she still didn't understand.

"Wait," Hadrian pushed himself up onto his elbows carefully, thankful that he didn't feel lightheaded anymore. "What do you mean about my mom? Is she okay? What's going on?" He asked frantically,
looking between Pomfrey and Snape.

"Mister Romanoff, calm down and we'll explain." Snape ordered. His harsh voice cut through Hadrian's panic and the green eyed boy settled back into his bed. "Now, from your mother's told us, you formed a magical bond with when you were young after an incident that frightened you."

Hadrian found himself nodding at the half-truth. He wasn't sure what they thought brought about the bond, but he doubted that they were any where close to the truth.

"It seems that through this bond, you and mother can share injuries when they meet a certain criteria. At least that's what we've managed to learn in the time that we had." Pomfrey continued. "Not every injury is shared between the two of you, as we were told that you've broken your arm before and your mother's arm remained unharmed."

"Yeah, when I was eight I got up in the middle of the night to go to the bathroom and tripped over Dummy." Hadrian explained.

"Dummy?" Snape inquired with a raised eyebrow.

"Uncle Tony's pet." Hadrian could practically hear Dummy beeping indignantly. He'd make it up to the robot during the holidays with a brand new canister of oil. "What does this have to with my mom?"

"In our research we found that in bonds such as this, other than facilitating a closer relationship between the people involved, it also acts as protection. When your mother was attacked with a poisoned knife, the wound was shared with you, the other half of the bond, to dilute the poison and allow your mother more time to be healed." Snape explained.

Hadrian's eyes widened. He had no idea that's what the bond did. He and his family had always just assumed that it just his magic recognizing her as his mother without disowning himself from his birth parents. Sirius and Remus had always planned to look into it a bit more, but with how hectic living with the Avengers and a magical kid was they just never got around to it.

Finding his voice, Hadrian asked, "Did you learn anything else about it?"

"We haven't had much time to research it. As soon as we understood a few basics about the bond and your mother was healed and she knew you were okay, she and her companion... invited the headmaster into his office for a talk." A small smirk played at Snape's lips.

Hadrian laughed outright before he realized what the professor said. "Who did she bring with her?"

"Loki Skywalker," Pomfrey answered almost dreamily. Hadrian wasn't surprised at that, his Uncle Loki had that affect on people.

"Uncle Loki? And the castle's still standing?"

"Well, your friends did wear the poor man out asking all sorts of questions about you. Miss Turpin in particular seemed intent on learning as many embarrassing stories about as she could." Pomfrey said with a smile.

Hadrian looked over at his still sleeping friends with a narrowed eyes. He kicked out at the closest one to him, which happened to be Terry. The tall boy jerked away.

"Hm?" Hadrian watched as Terry blinked the sleep away easily, looking wide awake in seconds. Brown eyes settled on him and widened. "Hadrian! You slimy snake, you're awake! Lisa, Nev,
wake up, Hadrian's awake!"

Lisa rolled over and nearly fell off the bed while Neville slowly came to awareness. Neville sat up slowly, rubbing the sleep out of his eyes and let out a jaw cracking yawn. Lisa seemed to be in a half-asleep half-awake state, her unfocused eyes looking at everything and nothing.

"Ha'rian?" Neville let out another yawn.

"Hey, Nev," Hadrian smiled. "You and Lisa got something to say?" He teased.

Neville blinked in confusion before remembering that he and Lisa were in the same bed. The Gryffindor went red in the face, the color reaching down to his neck, as he stammered out explanations and excuses. He only stopped when he realized that Hadrian and Terry were laughing loudly at him.

Rolling his eyes, Neville ignored them and tried to shake Lisa all the way awake.

"Can I see my mom now?" Hadrian asked once he got his laughter under control.

That helped to sober up Terry as well. "Yeah, and that Loki guy. We fell asleep before he could tell us about what happened on Hadrian's sixth birthday."

"Nothing happened on my sixth birthday! I turned six and ate cake, that's all!" Hadrian said automatically.

"See, now I really want to know what happened." Terry taunted.

"Mister Romanoff, I will accompany you to the headmaster's office." Snape distracted Hadrian from throwing a pillow at Terry's head like he had been planning. "Unless Madam Pomfrey would prefer you to stay here."

The healer didn't even get a chance to answer before Hadrian tossing the sheet back and scrambling to get out of the bed. Terry stood up from the arm chair he had been asleep in while Neville helped guide Lisa to her feet. Pomfrey sighed and reminded Hadrian to come see her immediately if his shoulder started acting up.

"Do you any of you know the way to the headmaster's office?" Snape asked while the first years tugged on their shoes.

"Never had any reason to go there," Terry answered though Hadrian and Neville nodded. Lisa was still out of it.

"Professor McGonagall and I used the Floo there when she took me to get my own wand." Neville answered quietly at Snape's questioning look.

Hadrian shrugged. "I explore the castle a lot during the weekends before anyone else is awake."

Snape didn't say anything as he led the first years out of the Hospital Wing.

Natasha sat in one of the chair's in the headmaster's office with her legs crossed and her arms resting leisurely on the arms of the chair. Loki stood behind the chair, looking like he didn't have a care in the world as he gazed over the many trinkets and books that lined the room. They made a beautiful picture of two people who had nothing better to than mess with an old man's head.

Natasha hid her smirk with a thoughtful smile.
Dumbledore sat behind his desk and was doing his best to look relaxed and at ease with the whole thing, but Natasha could see the tenseness in his shoulders and how his lips twitched downwards. Their arrival had thrown the old man off balance and their subsequent refusal to tell him just how they got through the wards didn't help. The only thing they told him was what they had decided would be safe for the school staff to know. Loki had expressed mild surprise when they weren't questioned on which professor wrote to them about Hadrian's condition.

Currently they were waiting for the arrival of Hadrian and his friends along with Professor Snape. Madam Pomfrey had Floo Called Dumbledore to tell him that the group was on their way and to watch Hadrian carefully as he had declined a pain relief potion for the lingering pain in his shoulder.

Dumbledore had attempted to start small talk several times, but after receiving nothing except nondescript answers that made it difficult to continue the conversation he had given up. Loki especially had fun giving long and ostensibly detailed responses that actually told the old man nothing he wanted to know.

Loki bent forward to whisper in Natasha's ear. "I can sense young Hadrian's approach."

"I called Darcy on the way over and told her to make sure Clint took his medication. Pepper said she'd stop by to make sure Darcy listened." Natasha said lowly as if in answer to something Loki had asked. Loki nodded and straightened up.

"Ah, it seems they're here," Dumbledore said suddenly.

Natasha traced out the 'wards?' on her thigh absently and Loki cleared his throat once for yes.

The door swung open and Hadrian barreled through, heading straight for his mother. Natasha stood up quickly, used to her son's antics. Hadrian jumped into his mother's outstretched arms and held onto her tightly while she hugged him back just as tightly.

"Oh, kotyonok," Natasha murmured into Hadrian's mess of hair.

"Momma!" Hadrian cried happily. He gave her an extra hard squeeze before letting go and dropping down to the floor. "Are you alright, momma?"

Natasha bent her knees a little to look Hadrian in the eye, a soft smile on her face. "I'm supposed to be asking you that, malyutka."

"You're slipping into Russian. You're worried." Hadrian commented.

"My son was hurt because someone took out a grudge on me. How do you think I feel, malen'kaya zmeyka?"

"Mama medved'," Hadrian accused.

Natasha flicked his forehead before straightening up to look over her son at the other people in the room.

"Hello, again," she directed towards the other children. "Neville, Lisa, and Terry, right?" She pointed at them each in turn and got affirming nods in response.

"Nice to see you, Miss Romanoff." Neville greeted shyly, though Natasha caught him looking between her and her son in consideration, a thoughtful crease playing at his brow.

"Yeah, so what happened on Hadrian's sixth birthday?" Terry asked loudly, unashamed.
Hadrian growled at the Ravenclaw. "Nothing happened! I turned six and ate cake now stop asking!"
The boy sent a pointed look in Loki's direction. The man met his gaze head on and smirked deviously.

Dumbledore cut through the banter with a chuckle. "Ah, now that we've all been reacquainted while
don't we turn our attention elsewhere?" The old man said with humor.

"Yes, why don't we?" Natasha gestured slightly in Loki's direction. The god nodded that he understood and with a careless wave of his hand, five new chairs identical to the one Natasha had been seated appeared in the room in a semi circle in front of the headmaster's desk.

Hadrian didn't waste anytime in taking a seat, well used to Loki's magic, but the others froze at the casual display of wandless conjuring. Snape recovered first and took a seat with Lisa, Neville, and Terry following shortly after. Dumbledore stared intently at Loki for several seconds before turning his attention to Natasha and Hadrian.

"Hadrian, my boy, how are you feeling?" Dumbledore said.

Natasha noticed that for all the wizard tried to turn the subject of conversation around to what he wanted to talk about, he seemed to be stalling with needless small talk.

"Just fine, Professor. Madam Pomfrey did a really good job." Hadrian said, lifting his left arm up and down for show.

"Yes, the school is quite lucky to have her in our employ." Dumbledore said with a mirthful laugh.

"Dumbledore, if you don't mind, could we get to the matter at hand? Though I rushed here to check on my son, I do have things to take care of back home," Natasha cut in before the headmaster could say anything else.

Hadrian hid a grin behind is hand.

Dumbledore cleared his throat. "Yes, well, Miss Romanoff. Since you refuse to give me a straight answer about how you breached the school's wards," Here he sent her a mildly disappointing stare that had no effect on the Russian. "I've resigned myself to figuring it out myself."

"Have fun," Loki smiled. Hadrian hid his laugh with a sudden cough, though Terry was much less successful, earning himself sharp looks from the headmaster and potions professor.

"I do have a few other questions," Dumbledore continued as if he hadn't been interrupted.
"Particularly about the bond between you and young Hadrian."

"I don't see how it's any of your business," Natasha said smoothly.

"As headmaster of the school-"

"Being headmaster doesn't give you the right to look into personal family matters that have nothing to do with the student's schooling." Natasha finished with a level stare at the old man, daring him to try to contradict her.

A look of consternation fluttered over Dumbledore's features before quickly disappearing. "I just wish to know all I can so that I may help your son should there be any call for it. And as you mentioned before, you don't know all that the bond entails and we have a reputable library here that could offer assistance in your research."
"You seem to be under the impression that I have no resources at my disposal. Let me clear things up for you, Professor Dumbledore," Natasha's voice had cooled several degrees and Hadrian leaned back in his seat as if trying to get out of the way of the coming carnage. "I am not some helpless non-magical that is lost in this new world of magic and fantasy. I have known about the magical world since the day Hadrian was born. I have interacted with citizens of the American Magical Community for years. I work in the magical world, as I've mentioned. Hadrian has not only had magical schooling for years, he's had tutors in several fields with their own respectable reputations.

"Non-magical relatives to witches and wizards are well versed in the magical community and are not left uneducated and ignorant. I have access to magical libraries as well as contacts with several Magical Universities that have entire departments dedicated to research. Hadrian has several uncles that are wizards themselves that would gladly help me in trying to understand the bond. I appreciate your offer, Headmaster, but I respectfully decline."

Silence filled the office for several long, tense moments while everyone processed what had just transpired.

Hadrian sat with a proud grin on his face, practically bouncing in his seat in his excitement. Neville and Terry's mouths had fallen open in shock as they glanced between the protective redhead and the dumbstruck headmaster. Lisa looked at Natasha with something close to worship in her eyes. Snape seemed torn between sneering at the blatant disrespect towards his employer and smirking at the blatant disrespect towards his employer.

Loki threw his head back and cackled.

"Is there anything else, Professor Dumbledore?" Natasha asked calmly.

Dumbledore took a moment to collect his bearings. "Some of my staff have expressed curiosity in why Mister Romanoff was invited to attend Hogwarts despite being out of the school's jurisdiction."

The old man said a little weakly.

"Oh, I know this!" Hadrian exclaimed, drawing attention to himself. "Uncle Remy explained that Hogwarts automatically registers a student's name when they're born. I was born in London so Hogwarts must've added my name to the registry."

"I see," Dumbledore said slowly.

Natasha resisted the urge to smirk victoriously at the old man. "Is that all?"

"Yes, Miss Romanoff, that is all. You may take your leave now." Dumbledore dismissed.

Natasha noticed Hadrian narrowing his eyes at the careless tone the headmaster used. "C'mon, Mom, I'll show you some of my favorite spots before you have to go." Hadrian grabbed his mother's hand and led her out of the office before Dumbledore could stop them.

Lisa jumped up from her seat, determination in her eyes, Neville and Terry following suit quickly. "Hadrian, wait up, don't forget to show her how to get into the kitchens!"

"And the Whomping Willow!" Terry added as the three first years rushed to catch up with their Slytherin friend and his mother. Loki took one last look at the irritated headmaster and amused professor before trailing after.

"Of course I'm gonna show her the Willow! I use it to train, y'know," Hadrian commented lightly. Lisa's exasperated and indignant yell of 'Hadrian Bartholomew Romanoff!' drifted up from the spiral staircase.
"That's not even my middle name!" Hadrian whined as their voices trailed off the farther away they got.

Snape turned to the headmaster with a clear expression. "Does that answer your questions?"

Minerva looked up when heard a knock at her office door. With a flick of her wand she had the time and she didn't have set meetings yet so she didn't know who it was.

"Come in," She said clearly, allowing the door to be opened when the ward Filius had placed around her door recognized her voice.

The door swung open to reveal Hadrian Romanoff, of all students, standing with Terry Boot, Lisa Boot, and one of her cubs, Neville Longbottom, along with an unfamiliar woman with dark red hair and striking green eyes and a handsome man with slicked back black hair and intent eyes that seemed to shift between striking green and clear sky blue that towered over all of them.

"Hello, Mister Romanoff," Minerva greeted, not letting her surprise show too much. "I see you're feeling better. I'm glad. You gave us quite the scare, young man."

Hadrian actually looked sheepish, running his hand through his messy hair and making it stick out in all directions even more. Something tightened in Minerva's chest as she recalled a certain student of hers doing the same thing with his own mess of his hair whenever he got caught doing something he shouldn't.

"Sorry 'bout that, but I'm all better now thanks to my mom and Uncle Loki!" Minerva raised a thin eyebrow at that. "I wanted to introduce them to all my teachers before they left."

Hadrian grabbed the red haired woman's hand and pulled her into the office, the other first years standing aside to let the man enter as well.

"Mom, Uncle Loki, this is Professor Minerva McGonagall, Deputy Headmistress, Gryffindor Head of House, Transfiguration Professor, and all around iron lady." Hadrian introduced with a dramatic sweeping bow. He straightened up before continuing. "Professor McGonagall, this lovely woman right here is my mother Natalie Romanoff, non-magical and magical lawyer extraordinaire, top notch mom, and all around kick ass lady." Natalie cuffed the back of her son's head in reprimand. Hadrian rubbed the back of his head where his mother hit him and scowled angrily at her, but his lips were twitching. "Anyway, this is my uncle Loki Skywalker... and I don't really know what he does for a living."

"He's a professional menace," Natalie offered dryly.

Loki bowed his head a little. "I aim to misbehave."

"Hadrian!"

"It wasn't me, Mom," Hadrian defended. "It must've been Uncle Tony. You know he hates making references and have the people he's around 'not understand his awesome.'" Hadrian made air quotes as he mockingly deepened his voice.

"I'll be looking into this, I promise," Natalie said in warning before turning back to Minerva. She reached forward with her hand out. "It's nice to meet you, professor. I've heard nothing but good things about you."

Minerva returned the handshake. "Nice to meet you as well, Miss Romanoff."
"Please, call me Natalie," The younger woman said with a careless wave of her hand.

"Natalie, then. Would you like me to call you Loki, Mister Skywalker?" The stern witch asked as she looked at Loki with her hand outstretched for him to shake. Instead Loki moved closer and took her smaller hand in his and turned it over before kissing the back of her hand.

"If I would have the pleasure of calling you by your given name," he said lowly. Lisa, Terry, and Neville stared wide eyed at the man who was actually flirting with their professor.

Minerva held back the laughter that threatened to bubble out."Why don't you take a seat?" Minerva offered even as she waved her wand and conjured another chair next to the one already in her office and a small couch behind the chairs for the children to sit in.

Natalie nodded her thanks as she slid into her seat, Loki following her example. The first years on the other hand apparently decided that the best way to get on the couch was to wrestle each other for their spot.

"I presume that you've already spoken with the headmaster?" Minerva said with a searching look between the two adults.

Natalie nodded. "We've discussed how and why Hadrian was injured and our arrival at the school itself even though I'm a non-magical."

"Is Hadrian alright?" Minerva asked.

Natalie smiled prettily. "He's just fine, professor. In no time he'll be back to turning people's hair green and their tongues purple."

"That was one time, Mom! One time! Let it go!" Hadrian exclaimed, making his friends laugh without mercy.

Minerva let out a small chuckle of her own. "I'll be on the look out then. Now, do you have anything in particular you would like to discuss?"

"Actually, seeing as Hogwarts doesn't send home progress reports I was wondering if you wouldn't mind telling me how Hadrian's doing in your class. I could ask him, but he'd probably be a bit biased." Natalie sent a smile over her shoulder at her son who stuck his tongue out at her. "I would like to keep up with his schooling as best I can."

"Progress report?" Minerva asked in confusion. She had heard a few muggleborns mention something along that line, but never thought to ask about it or if she did it wasn't the right time and by the time it was she had forgotten about it.

"It's like a report card. They're basically letters sent home to the parents or guardians of a student letting them know what their grades are in each subject. Report cards are usually sent home twice a semester and progress reports are sent every two or three weeks. Progress reports show how well or bad the student is doing so far and lets the parent or guardian know if their child needs to work on anything to bring their grades up." Natalie explained when Minerva didn't show any understanding at what a report card was.

"I... see," Minerva said slowly.

Natalie seemed to notice something as she said, "I wasn't surprised when I learned that Hogwarts doesn't have that system. From my understanding, most boarding schools don't. Hadrian used to go to a magical day school, though, and I've gotten quite used to knowing how well my son is doing in
class without waiting for the end of year marks."

"He had magical schooling before Hogwarts?" Minerva asked in surprise. She knew that muggles sent their children to school as early as five years old, but the magical schools she knew of began schooling children at eleven like Hogwarts.

"Oh, Hadrian told us about this," Lisa spoke up, drawing attention to her where she was seated between Terry and Neville. "Hadrian said in the States that once accidental magic is recorded, if the family's non-magical they contact them and let them know about their options. The day schools in America teach both magical and non-magical subjects so a lot of them just enroll their magical kids in one of the schools in their district." Lisa turned to Hadrian for confirmation. When Hadrian nodded, she continued. "They mostly don't start practicals until their core is more stable, but they do theory and history and passive magical classes until then along with non-magical classes."

Minerva slid her glasses off and placed them gently on her desk in shock. "Both magical and muggle classes? What do the purebloods say about that?"

Hadrian answered this time. "There's not a lot drama about that kind of thing because kids raised in the magical world take a Non-Magical Customs course when they start school and the non-magical raised take a Magical Customs course so there's not a lot of confusion and accidental insulting." The green eyed boy shrugged. "Oh, Mom, when you get back can you send my old Non-Magical Customs books we got for Uncle Siri? These three wanna use them."

His friends' smiles brightened at the prospect.

"Children," Minerva cut in after Natalie agreed. "Would mind if I took a look through those books as well. Though I spend more time in the muggle world than my colleagues thanks to my visiting the homes of muggleborns, I find myself woefully confused with more and more things each year."

"I can have one of Hadrian's uncles make several copies of the books if you would like." Natalie answered for her son. "If you think any of the other professors would like them, you can send a letter to our address in London and I'll have enough made for everyone."

"I believe I'll do that. I'm sure Filius and Pomona would love the idea." Minerva relaxed. Being able to study those books would only help her understand her muggleborn students and help alleviate the worries their parents had. The stern witch took a moment to gather herself from the surprising revelations about Hadrian's prior schooling.

"Now, I believe you asked about Hadrian's classes..."

No one seemed to notice Loki's hands glowing green.

"And this is the Ravenclaw tower, the humble abode for Sir Terrence and Lady Lisa." Hadrian said dramatically.

Lisa pinched the bridge of her nose and sighed. Hadrian had taken to introducing his mother and uncle to everything with the same theatrics each time, from the kitchens to the Whomping Willow. Though he had sort of paid for it when Uncle Loki had tore into him for not telling anyone we was using the Willow as a training partner. Natalie had been too busy fighting the tree herself, firmly cementing herself as a badass in the kids' eyes.

The entrance guardian woke up. "What heavy seven letter word can you take two away from and be left with eight?"
Terry stepped forward. "Weights."

The guardian nodded in acceptance of the answer before the entrance opened. Terry and Lisa led Hadrian, Neville, Natalie, and Loki into the Ravenclaw common room.

When they stepped through, all conversation stopped. Lisa supposed that they made an odd sight, especially after the panic and worry of Hadrian's injury and now here they were looking right as rain, Hadrian even smiling. The green eyed boy wiggled his fingers in a wave at the stunned eagles.

"Hadrian!" Morag reached them first, her arms outstretched. Hadrian didn't hesitate to step into them, allowing the taller girl to wrap her arms tightly around him and rock him around as she muttered things none of them caught on to.

Mandy, Su, and Leanne came up behind her with Mandy and Su adding themselves to the fierce hug while Leanne watched with a smile.

"Oh, I see how it is, a guy's gotta get stabbed to get any love around here, huh, Neville?" Terry whined, crossing his arms and huffing. Natalie responded by pulling him into a hug, careful about where she held as he was just tall enough that something less innocent could happen. When she let go, Terry had a strange smug and goofy grin on his face. Lisa rolled her eyes.

"Girls, this is Natalie Romanoff, Hadrian's mum, and Loki Skywalker, his uncle." Lisa introduced, a bit of sadness lacing her voice. "Miss Natalie, Uncle Loki, this is my older sister, Leanne, and our friends Su Li, Mandy Brockleburst, and Morag MacDougal."

Leanne smiled and held her hand out, shaking Natalie's hand. "Nice to meet you, Miss Natalie." She turned and held her hand out to Loki who turned it over to kiss the back of it. Her face flushed.

Mandy, Morag, and Su had finally let Hadrian go. His hair was practically acting as compass the way it was sticking out and shirt and pants were rumpled up. He rushed back to his mother's side, her small hand coming up to card through his unruly hair seemingly out of reflex.

"Girls," Hadrian shuddered, not phased by the glares he received for that. Hadrian grabbed his mum's hand and pulled her towards an unoccupied couch, coincidentally the same one his friends had waited on while they worried over his well being. The others followed his lead and soon they were all sitting on or around the couch; Natalie and Loki on either side of Hadrian and Neville, Mandy and Su together in one arm chair they had pulled closer to the couch, Lisa and Morag in the other, while Terry and Leanne were seated on bean bag chairs Loki had conjured. Leanne had managed to seat herself comfortably while Terry managed to fall out three times.

"Where's Dean and Seamus?" Neville asked. "I thought they left with you when you got kicked out by Madam Pomfrey."

Mandy shook her head. "We ran into the headmaster when we were walking out and he suggested that we all return to our own common rooms to be among friends."

"What does that even mean? Dean and Seamus are welcome here, right?" Terry asked the room, getting a few distracted nods from the other Ravenclaws in the room. Neither of the Gryffindors were too loud or destructive, at least when they were in the Ravenclaw tower, though Seamus was banned from trying out new charms in case anything caught on fire.

Ravenclaw Tower had become one of the hang out points for the first years as it was really the only house where they could all get together. Gryffindor was out because no one wanted to risk a blow up if Hadrian walked in, Slytherin was out for obvious reasons, and they weren't really close enough
friends with anyone from Hufflepuff to warrant being there.

Mandy shrugged. "Who knows?"

"What I wan' to know is why Hadrian's mum and uncle are here. Not that it's a bad thing, but why?" Morag asked curiously.

Lisa watched intently as Natalie explained about the bond that Hadrian had formed between them at a young age and all the unknown and questions that surrounded it, though they did understand it a bit more now.

"Whoa, Hadrian, you don't do things by half, do ya?" Morag teased. "Go back to the States and save me the stress."

"I'll get right on that," Hadrian said mockingly.

"Not for real, though, right?" Su asked quietly.

Natalie put her hands behind Hadrian and Neville's heads, her fingers playing with both of their hair to Neville's shock and pleasure. He hadn't realized how much he craved a mother's touch.

"While I don't appreciate having my son attend a school where a teacher has to go behind their employer's back to inform a parent that their child has been injured I haven't yet decided to pull him. Regardless of the fact that Professor Dumbledore believed me to be incapable of entering the grounds I should have been told." Natalie explained. "Hadrian's been given until the end of this tour to convince me to let him stay."

Conspiring looks were shared all around, making the Romanoff's smile.

"He should at least stay until the Halloween feast. It's, like, the best thing of the year!" Terry said after a long moment.

"How would you know? You're a first year," Morag pointed out.

"Everyone knows that," Terry said with a pout.

"Actually," Natalie interrupted. "Halloween may be a point towards him leaving."

Terry looked between his friend and his mom. "Huh? Why?"

"For as long as I can remember we've had the same Halloween traditions. Auntie Darcy picks out my costume, Auntie Pepper decorates, Uncle Bruce makes chocolate chip pancakes, Uncle Tony tries to become Gene Wilder, Uncle Clint takes me to the best haunted houses JARVIS found, and whoever's free takes me trick or treating," Hadrian explained wistfully. "And when it's time for bed I get told stories about my... aunt and uncle." His voice lowered in faded sadness.

"Hadrian?" Lisa said softly, as confused as the others about the change in behavior.

Hadrian hid his face in his mother's shoulder, leaving her to answer. "When Hadrian was young, his aunt and uncle lost their lives protecting him on Halloween. His uncles Siri and Remy knew them best out of all of us so every year on Halloween they tell him stories about them and light two candles in their honor."

Lisa noticed the others looking down except Neville, who was staring at Hadrian and his mum with an indecipherable expression.
"I would like to meet with your young friends again," Loki said lightly, breaking the heavy silence that had fallen over them. "Seamus and Dean. Gryffindors were they? Perhaps young Neville could show us the way."

No one commented on the thankful smile Hadrian sent his uncle's way.

Neville couldn't remember a time when the Gryffindor common room was this quiet when there were students in it.

It had been decided that Neville would just go in and get Dean and Seamus as it would be too much of a headache for anyone else to enter. They had been lucky that the Ravenclaws had held back their questions - they might get bombarded later but for now they had escaped unscathed. Neville wasn't sure his housemates would be able to hold back their curiosity.

Neville stepped through the entrance, confused as to why they were all staring at him with wide eyes until he realized that portrait hadn't closed behind him and most of the Gryffindors could see the odd group standing in the corridor.

The ones outside didn't seem to notice the attention on them. Terry and Morag had teamed up against Hadrian to find out about the Top Secret Sixth Birthday from Loki, Su was enjoying speaking in Cantonese with Natalie, and Lisa was telling Mandy about what had happened in the headmaster's office.

"Uh, S-Seamus? Where's, uh, Dean?" Neville asked the fair skinned boy, his nerves returning under the stare of his housemates.

Seamus stood up and walked closer to Neville. "He's in the shower. What's up?"

"Uh, all of us are showing Miss Natalie and Uncle Loki around the school before they have to leave. We were going to go introduce them to Marvin after this." Neville explained lowly, not wanting to be overheard by everyone else. He knew if they heard him they would all be followed by a sea of red and gold.

"Cool. Let me go to tell Dean to hurry it up and we'll meet you guys in the corridor." Seamus said, having noticed the others in the room trying to listen in on what they were saying. Neville nodded and turned to go wait with the group while Seamus got Dean.

When he stepped out into the corridor, the others stopped talking and looked behind him. Neville turned his head to see that two people were following him. Hermione Granger and Ron Weasley.

Neville sent a panicked look to his friends who seemed at just as much a loss as he was.

"Neville, what are you doing and who are they?" Hermione demanded. Natalie raised her eyebrow at the tone.

Loki drawled, sending a pointed look at the bushy haired girl.

Hermione pinked, but kept her head up. "Well, then, who are you and what are you doing here? Does Professor Dumbledore know you're here?"

"No, Granger, the headmaster has no idea when strangers enter the wards and his school." Hadrian said sarcastically.
"Hadrian, be nice," Natalie scolded. "I'm Natalie Romanoff, Hadrian's mother." She introduced herself to the girl. Hermione nodded and turned to Loki.

"They know me as Loki Skywalker," Loki said nothing more.

Hermione nodded slowly and said in more sedate manner, "I'm Hermione Granger. Now-"

"Oi, what are you doing here? You a Slytherin, too?" Ron interrupted, directing his second question towards Loki with a glare. Hermione sent him a disapproving scold at his lack of manners.

Neville hurried to Terry's side when Natalie leveled Ron with a look. "We came to check on Hadrian. Is that a problem?"

"What do you care about that snake for anyway?" Ron asked. Neville face palmed while Lisa and Hadrian rolled their eyes in sync. Terry, Su, Morag and Mandy stared at the red haired boy in fascination.

Natalie's eyes narrowed dangerously. "That's my son you're talking about." She warned.

Ron snorted. "So? He's a Slytherin. He probably tells his git housemates all kinds of things about you 'cause you're just a muggle and he wants to be a pureblood like Malfoy."

"What kind of logic is that?" Su muttered to herself.

Terry and Neville grabbed hold of Hadrian when he made a step forward, ready to attack the redhead for his words. "That's my mom you're talking about, you bastard! Say something again and I'll rearrange your face! Your own mother won't recognize you when I'm done, you mother-"

"Hadrian, calm down!" Lisa exclaimed, though she was also shooting daggers at the freckled Gryffindor.

"What's he gonna do? Use the dark spells he learned from Snape on me? He'll just be expelled and thrown in Azkaban." Ron scoffed, ignoring the disbelieving and angered looks he was getting from everyone - Hermione in particular looked ready to draw her own wand on him.

"Ronald, bite your tongue!" Hermione shrieked.

Loki stepped forward in front of Ron and drew himself to his full height, towering over the Weasley boy. His hands began to glow a deep green that matched his eyes. He reached one out and grasped Ron's chin and forced him to look up. "You would be wise to watch your tongue in the presence of my nephew. I may not be one of your hated Slytherins, but I can promise you that whatever you fear from them has absolutely nothing on me." Loki intoned, staring straight into the boy's blue eyes.

"Let him go!" Hermione ordered, turning her glower on the older man when he grabbed Ron. "You can't do that to him. He's just a student and you're a fully grown wizard. He doesn't know what he's talking about. You could be arrested for threatening him."

"I am no wizard," Loki said cryptically as he turned to face the angered girl. "And your laws have no hold on me." He added before letting go of Ron's face and moving back.

Hadrian had calmed down enough for Terry and Neville to relinquish their hold on him, though Terry kept a hand on the dark haired boy's shoulder in case he tried to rush the redhead again.

"What are you talking about? Of course you're a wizard, I just saw you use magic. And I don't care who you are, you aren't above the law. I'll be telling Professor Dumbledore about this. Come on,
Ronald. You should get checked over." Hermione said, grabbing Ron's wrist and dragging him away. Ron allowed it with only the barest of mumbling about being manhandled, though he kept sending glares back at the group, specifically at Loki and Hadrian who both waved mockingly at him.

Dean and Seamus stepped out at that moment. Dean dressed in new clothes.

Seamus looked around. "What'd we miss?"

Wayne Hopkins walked as quickly as he could with his head ducked to hide the tears in his eyes.

Justin Finch-Fletchley and Ernie MacMillan had run into him when he was on his way outside, wanting nothing more than to just lay in the grass and enjoy the fading sun. It was getting colder each day and he wanted to enjoy as much of it as he could. Unfortunately, Justin had taken the opportunity to mock him for failing in most of his classes and being tied with Vincent Crabbe, Gregory Goyle, and Ron Weasley, the idiots of Slytherin and Gryffindor respectively. Ernie hadn't done much more than just watch, but his inaction was almost as hurtful as Justin's taunts.

Wayne had only been able to get away when Ernie finally said something when Justin started talking about Wayne being a disgrace to muggleborns and that he was proving ponces like Malfoy right.

For once Wayne had wished that the stereotypes about Hufflepuff were true because then Justin would be too nice and weak willed to be so mean all the time.

Not that he had been wrong. Wayne was failing most of their classes, only pulling up his grade in Herbology where he was second in the year, though that wasn't anything spectacular as most Hufflepuffs had a natural aptitude toward the subject, along with Neville Longbottom who seemed to be able to talk to the plants and was well known as the first in the class. He didn't know what was wrong, but every time Wayne tried to use his magic it felt wrong and like he was pushing when he should be pulling. He had heard about Neville getting a new wand because his old wasn't matched to him, but he knew that wasn't the case with him. Even though it had taken a long time for Ollivander to find a compatible wand for Wayne, he had found it, a flower springing from the tip of it when he waved it for the first time.

Maybe he just wasn't magically strong enough to actually use magic and the teachers had made a mistake. The only accidental magic that he could remember doing mostly revolved around floating cookies and making his stuffed animals bark and growl like real animals.

He wondered how long it would take for the teachers to notice that he wasn't supposed to be at Hogwarts and kick him out.

Wayne was pulled from his self-deprecating thoughts when he heard the overlapping voices of several people walking towards him. He glanced up quickly to see students from Gryffindor, Ravenclaw, and a Slytherin along with two adults he had never seen before. Wayne recognized Neville Longbottom first, and guessed that the Slytherin was Hadrian Romanoff, the only snake who would willingly hang out with Gryffindors like that. The others were part of the inter-house study group that was rapidly growing infamy each time they were caught in the library at their usual table.

Wayne ducked his head again and hurried to the side of the corridor to hide against the stone wall, hoping against hope that none of them would notice him as they walked past.

Everything was toomuch toomuch toomuch and it was wearing down on him. His skin itched and his head ached. He couldn't be able to handle the curious stares and the well meaning questions if they
saw his tears.

His plan almost worked until the tall, handsome man that reminded him of some of the older Slytherins he had seen stopped abruptly and his striking green eyes immediately found Wayne's own grey ones.

The rest of the group noticed that the man had stopped and looked back curiously, finally seeing Wayne who was trying to see if he had suddenly developed the ability to walk through walls.

"What's your name?" The man asked, his voice deep and filled with something that had Wayne's ears twitching.

"Wayne H-Hopkins," the Hufflepuff answered softly. He couldn't figure out why the man was staring at him so intently.

The man cocked his head as he continued to gaze at Wayne. "Young Wayne, tell me, of what were you born?"

"I'm a muggleborn, sir," Wayne said hesitantly. Was the man a bigoted pureblood who wanted to mess with his head? Wayne didn't think so because it was well known now that Hadrian Romanoff was a muggleborn as well and the Slytherin seemed at ease in his company.

"I did not ask if you were a first generation wizard, young Wayne, I asked of what you were born." The man repeated.

"Uncle Loki?" Hadrian called out, confusion lacing his words.

Loki didn't take his eyes off of Wayne though, and the Hufflepuff was starting to shift from foot to foot nervously.

"I don't know what you mean then, sir," Wayne said truthfully.

"Does your skin itch when your heart picks up? Do you wish to only be allowed to spend your time outside with the wind in your hair and the moon on your skin? Do the vines of earth call to you?" Loki asked, taking a step forward, his now earth green eyes pinned on Wayne who could suddenly hear the sounds of the forest.

"Loki," The woman said, warning and questions in her tone.

"He is not mortal born," Loki said casually.

Wayne's heart skipped a beat. "Wh-what? What are you talking about? My parents are muggles."

Loki arched an eyebrow delicately at that. "The ones who took you in and raised you may well be mortal, but that does change the fact that you are not."

"How'd you know?" Wayne whispered, his voice just barely heard in the too quiet hallway.

"Know what?" Terry Boot asked, too loud to Wayne's ears.

"That I'm adopted. My parents found me abandoned in the woods during a camping trip." Wayne explained slowly.

"So you might not be muggleborn after all?" Seamus Finnigan wonder aloud.

Wayne's head snapped up to look at Loki. "Do you know who my parents are, sir?" He tried to keep
the hope out of his voice, but if the man did then perhaps he could finally have answers to his questions.

"I do not know who were born to," Wayne's heart dropped. "I only sense what you were born to."

"What I was born to?" This was too much. He needed to leave, needed to get outside and run for as long as he could. He needed the moon, he needed the air, he needed the earth. It was too much, too much. 

Loki stalked forward with purpose, stopping just in front of the hyperventilating Wayne and bent over so that their faces were even with the other's. Something from the man reached out to Wayne's senses, calming him and allowing him to get air into his lungs.

Wayne took a deep, steadying breath and closed his eyes until his heartbeat returned to normal. He opened them slowly and saw only earth green for miles. "What am I, sir?"

"Lythari."

Something in Wayne's mind, body, and magic came together suddenly and his whole being felt at completely at ease for the first time. The grey eyed boy could feel a warmth just under his skin that comforted him. Wayne glanced over at the stunned group behind Loki who were staring at him in wonderment and puzzlement.

Loki reached out a hand and drew something across Wayne's forehead before straightening up.

Loki smiled and Wayne smiled back.

Lathaniel could barely contain the shocked gasp that threatened to come out when he saw Hadrian Romanoff, recent victim of a stab wound, walking around with the oddest bunch of people without a care in the world.

Lathaniel recognized most of them, having seen them with Romanoff at one point or another, though three of them didn't ring any bells with him. The beautiful woman with blood red hair who walked with a grace he had only seen with felines, a handsome black hair man who towered over the rest of them dressed to the nines in greys and a familiar green, and an unknown Hufflepuff with light brown hair bleeding into blond who seemed to be trying his best to stay by the man's side as much as possible.

When Romanoff shouted 'Mom' loudly at something she said a few things fell into place, but it also raised more questions. Romanoff had openly admitted that mother was a muggle, so she shouldn't have been able to even see Hogwarts for what it was, never mind actually enter it.

Just as he was debating on whether or not to go over to the strange group and introduce himself in an attempt to answer of some of this questions, he spotted all but one of the first year Slytherin girls already making their way to them, Greengrass at the front of the charge.

Lathaniel moved closer to where everyone had congregated near Black Lake, some of the first years having taken off their shoes and socks and rolled their pants up to wade into the lake; he guessed someone had cast some warming charms because even now it was getting too cold to be in the water without the sun high in the sky. The Slytherin tried to make it seem like he wasn't attempting to eavesdrop, but wasn't sure how well he was doing. If they had been in the castle or if he had been with friends it would've been easier, but he made due.

"Hadrian, I heard you were stabbed." Davis said bluntly, earning a sharp jab in the ribs from
Greengrass.

"Tracey, I heard you were beautiful. Guess both of our sources were correct." Romanoff replied, laughing when Davis winked at him.

Lathaniel could practically feel Greengrass roll her eyes at the two of them. If they weren't careful, she'd be the new Marigold in a few years. "I'm surprised Madam Pomfrey let out already. Is it safe for you to be walking around now?"

Lathaniel wondered how many of them caught on to what she was really asking.

Romanoff shrugged. "Mom and Uncle Loki showed up and explained what happened. They had already taken care of it back home before they heard about what happened to me."

So whoever hurt Romanoff had been outside the castle, and presumably all the way over in America. Well, that meant that the Slytherin house wouldn't be able to retaliate against the culprit. He would have to make sure that the others knew as well - wide scale retaliation was one thing, needless scheming was another. And Lathaniel had been wanting to see what Hoster and Dalton came up with, too.

Greengrass nodded, but before she could say anything else, Moon stepped forward excitedly. "So this is your mum? She's real pretty, Hadrian. You've got her eyes, of course you probably hear that all the time. He's your uncle? I thought maybe he could be your dad."

Romanoff's mother and uncle shared an amused look before the man raised his eyebrow suggestively.

"Yes, she is, and no, he's not. He just showed up one day, turned my Uncle Tony into a llama, and we haven't been able to get rid of him since." Romanoff smirked when the man sniffed indignantly. "Oh, Mom, Uncle Loki, this is Daphne Greengrass, Princess of Slytherin, Tracey Don't-Get-On-The-Wrong-Side-Of-Her-Wand Davis, Lily 'Chatterbox' Moon, and the darling Millicent Bulstrode, the only person I've met who could give Auntie Darcy a run for her money when it comes to hugs." Romanoff gestured to each girl in turn, Greengrass sniffing at the title, Davis preening under the praise, Moon grinning unabashedly, and Bulstrode going red down to her neck. "Girls, this is my mother, Natalie Romanoff, lawyer for the masses, protector of her son, and obsessed with the state of my hair. Oh, and that's Loki Skywalker." He finished with a dismissive wave of his hand in the man's direction.

Skywalker waved his hand over the top of Romanoff's head. Lathaniel watched in fascination as the normally black, unruly hair faded into white then darkened into a deep fuschia with light blue tips. It wasn't necessarily a bad color combination but the state of Romanoff's hair made it comical.

"You can do magic? I thought Hadrian was a muggleborn. Wait, no, he said you two aren't blood related. Do you know anyone else who can do magic? Is that why you're so good? And why you know so much? Do you know anyone who came to Hogwarts?" Moon fired off, barely pausing for breath to everyone's amusement.

"I have four magical uncles who live with me," Romanoff answered.

Skywalker snorted. "I hardly think my brother should be added to that list."

"The dude makes lightening. He's magical." Hadrian replied as he ran his hand through his hair. His hand paused in his movements as if he felt something off and he pulled down some of his hair that barely reached his eyes and looked at it crossed eyed. "Uncle Loki!"
The man only laughed deeply and side stepped out of the way of a charging Romanoff. Romanoff took his wand out and pointed it at his uncle who held his hands up in mock surrender before jutting one hand out, glowing a soft green, a root shooting up from the ground and wrapping itself around Romanoff's legs.

"I need back up!" The green eyed boy called. Boot, Finnigan, Li, Turpin, and Thomas ran eagerly to his side, their wands out and wide grins on their faces. Brocklehurst, Longbottom, and MacDougal were still in the water calling out to the Giant Squid and the Hufflepuff had taken station with Skywalker, calling out warnings when he could, though his own wand stayed put away.

Skywalker narrowed his eyes playfully. "Let's see what you've been taught at this illustrious school of yours,"

Romanoff's mother turned back to the surprised Slytherin girls with an exasperated smile on her face. "Hadrian has that effect on people."

"I've been noticing," Greengrass commented dryly.

"So he's really okay?" Bulstrode asked hesitantly, wringing her hands together as she watched the six first years team up against the older man and his Hufflepuff sidekick.

Romanoff's mother nodded. "Madam Pomfrey wouldn't have let him out if he wasn't. And I would've dragged him back if she had." She assured. "Though I wouldn't mind you keeping an eye on him in case his shoulder starts acting up."

"Which one?" Davis answered.

The woman smiled.

"You should tell your Head of House at least, Wayne," Mandy said after Morag finished explaining how to cast the drying spell. They had all, except Miss Natalie, been soaked to the bone after the Slytherin girls had left when the Giant Squid had shown up. Marvin had proceeded to splash them as much as he could while they played with him. "Exaresco," She said clearly, watching with satisfaction as her clothes and hair dried up quickly. She turned to see Wayne staring uncertainly at his wand and kindly cast it on him.

"Thanks," he mumbled. "And I'm not sure. What if they try to expel me because they think I'm like a werewolf? I got a book at Flourish and Blotts about different magical creatures and I read that werewolves aren't allowed into Hogwarts. I don't want to be kicked out when I just found out what's happening to me."

Mandy didn't say anything for a few moments. "Maybe you should talk to Loki about it. I mean, he's the one who figured out what you are. Maybe he can help you explain it to Professor Sprout." The Ravenclaw suggested and tucked her light hair behind her ear.

Wayne glanced over at the tall man who was talking quietly to Miss Natalie. "Maybe..."

"Good," Mandy grabbed Wayne's hand and pulled him over to the adults. "Mister Skywalker, Wayne was wondering if you could tell him more about this Lythari business. He's scared to tell a professor because he doesn't want to be kicked out."

Loki sent a look to the blushing Hufflepuff. "Is that correct, young Wayne?"

Wayne nodded and looked down, embarrassed. Loki reached and grasped Wayne's chin, much
gentler than when he had done the same to Ron, and tilted the boy's head back. "There is nothing to be ashamed of. The Lythari are a race of Wood Elves who are highly regarded by their cousins as protectors of family and symbols of strength. The primal you carry with you, your wolf, is only made to protect your pack and what you call home. Once you accept this, you will be free."

Mandy thought she heard Hadrian say something about a blue hypocrite, but he covered it with a cough so she couldn't be sure. Though Loki did send a scowl in his nephew's direction.

"If you would like, I could join you when you approach your Head of House. I will be more able to explain what your being a Lythari means." Loki offered kindly.

"What, what if-" Wayne's eyes began to water. "What if she tells me she doesn't want me in her house anymore? What if they make me go home and my parents don't want to take of a freak they found in the woods?" Tears fell from his grey eyes. Mandy grabbed him in a tight hug, holding him to her and running her fingers through his hair comfortingly.

"If any of that happens, Uncle Loki will kidnap you and take back with him to New York. So what if you turn into a wolf? So does Uncle Remy. Uncle Siri turns into a dog. Uncle Clint turns into a child if you take away his Twinkies. Don't even get me started on Uncle Bruce." Hadrian said lightly, though his green eyes were serious as he regarded the crying boy. Mandy squeezed Wayne one last time before stepping away, though she kept her hand on the boy's elbow, ready to draw him back in.

Natalie bent over and placed her hand on the sniffling Wayne's shoulder. "Hadrian's right. If it comes to that, though hopefully it won't, you'll have somewhere to go. There are magical schools in America that have no problem enrolling students of mixed heritage."

Seamus walked over and clapped Wayne on the back. "Don't worry 'bout it, mate. You're one of us now and we take care of our own."

"He's right, Wayne," Neville agreed with a smile.

"Yeah," Terry added. "You'll never getting rid of us now. You're stuck with us now, mate. Get used to it." He let out a mad cackle.

Wayne looked between all of them, a ghost of a thankful smile on his lips.

"How about you and Uncle Loki go talk to Sprout and the rest of us go ask the house elves for some lunch someplace. I'm starving anyway," Hadrian suggested.

Su nodded. "Yeah, this way you won't be all crowded. We could eat out in the courtyard, like a picnic." The other first years made various noises of agreement.

"Thank you," Wayne said sincerely. They all waved it off and said goodbyes for now as they walked off to ask the Hogwarts house elves for help. Somehow they ended up in a race with Morag and Hadrian in the lead. Wayne watched them until they turned around the corner, their shouting and accusations of cheating fading.

"Come, young Wayne. The sooner we discuss this with your professor, the sooner you will be calmed." Loki said.

"Coming, sir,"

Natasha pulled Hadrian aside when they reached the kitchens.
"I know, Momma. I will," Hadrian promised before she could say anything. "I'll watch over him."

"I know you will." She ran a hand through his hair, for once not bothered that it was such a mess. "Just remember that you don't have to do it alone."

Hadrian nodded then smiled. "Guess I'm staying after all."
Pomona Sprout nearly fell into the large pot she was planting seeds in when someone suddenly called out her name.

Righting herself, and trying to preserve her dignity if whoever it was had seen her almost face plant into the wet soil, she wiped her hands on her apron and turned to see one of her first year badgers, Wayne Hopkins, standing in the doorway of the greenhouse with an anxious look. Behind him stood a handsome man with slicked back hair and piercing eyes who had a large hand placed reassuringly on Wayne's shoulder.

"Ah, Mister Hopkins, and...?" Pomona trailed off expectantly even as she put her hands in the pocket of her apron, fingering her wand. She didn't recognize the man and her student looked troubled about something. If the stranger proved to be a threat then he had chosen the wrong place to meet her. The greenhouse was her domain and her power was held in the earth. The man would be in a world of surprise if he thought her no threat.

"Loki Skywalker, I journeyed here with young Hadrian's mother to help in his healing." The man introduced himself.

Pomona nodded, though she kept her hand on her wand. "And what brings you all the way out here with Mister Hopkins?" She asked with a edge of steel to her words.

Loki gestured to Wayne to step forward into the greenhouse. "Young Wayne here has something to inform you of."

"Is that so?" She asked, her eyebrows shooting up.

Wayne nodded before swallowing and nervously and looked back at Loki for support. Loki only arched an eyebrow at the boy and gestured with his hand towards the Hufflepuff Head of House.

Pomona frowned. The plump witch stepped towards her student and reached out to him in worry. "Mister Hopkins, Wayne, whatever it is it you wish to tell me, I'll listen. Is it truly important?"

Wayne nodded slowly. "Then I will sit here and listen until you are finished. The only reason you should worry is if you've done something that's broken the rules, though I doubt that's what this is about." She added with a small, teasing grin and was rewarded with a shaky smile in return.

The Herbology professor led her student over to one of the benches, noting that Loki, while still within sight and earshot, kept his distance to allow some semblance of privacy. Pomona wondered what the man had to do with anything, though she guessed she would find out soon enough.

Once they were both sitting comfortably, Pomona having decided against casting a privacy ward around the two of them when she noticed the almost panicked looks Wayne kept sending the man watching them, as if seeking reassurance.

"Now, Wayne, would you mind telling me what this is about?" She asked gently. She absently
wondered if this was something that would have to be taken to the headmaster.

Wayne took a deep breath. "Do you know why I'm failing every class except yours?" He started. Pomona shook her head, honestly not knowing the answer. It could be a multitude of things - from homesickness to not being able to adapt to the new world he had been thrown into or nerves or he could just very well be a less than spectacular student who only showed any effort in something that interested him. "I didn't at first either. I mostly understood the theory when we went over it in class, but when it got to actually casting the spells it didn't feel right."

"Didn't... feel right?" Pomona asked curiously.

"Yeah, like when you try to push open a door that you're supposed to pull. It wouldn't go the way I wanted it to go and it made it really hard to cast even the spells the professors said are really easy and simple." Wayne looked down in an attempt to hide his embarrassed blush.

"And you've discovered what was causing this difficulty?"

Wayne's grey eyes flickered over to Loki once again. "Yeah. Hadrian and his friends were showing his mom and uncle around the castle when Loki sensed what I was."

"What you are?" Pomona asked, wide-eyed. She noticed Loki watching her reaction intently - searching for any sort of fear or rejection. It warmed her slightly to see that the man was being so protective of one of her badgers as much as it confused her as well. "And what would that be?" The witch was proud of how even her tone was even if she was surprised at the turn of events.

"Lythari," Wayne answered quietly, his eyes firmly on the ground.

Pomona was at a loss. She had never heard of a magical creature named Lythari before, but that would explain why no one had noticed Wayne's status until Loki. Perhaps the man's field of study were of magical creatures, it would explain plenty.

Loki seemed to have noticed her unspoken confusion as he moved forward. "Lythari are true lycanthropes."

Pomona gasped. "They're related to werewolves?" She ventured cautiously, unsure how to proceed. She didn't wish to offend Wayne with her questions.

"Not in the way you think," Loki answered. "Lythari are good-aligned elves capable of changing into lupine form at will, with no curse on them to bring about the change. They are a race of forest elves sometimes known as silver shadows to their cousins. Unlike the lycanthropes you have no doubt heard of they are a benevolent and companionable species in their lupine forms, though they hunt much the same as regular wolves."

"Loki says that they're pretty shy race, preferring to stay to themselves for the most part, so it would explain why not a lot of people know about them." Wayne added quietly, his head up but his eyes looking over her shoulder.

Pomona stayed silent for several long moments. If she opened her mouth before she collected her thoughts she might say something that could hurt Wayne's obviously low confidence and reinforce the idea that he should fear telling someone about this.

Loki had explained that they were different than normal werewolves, being able to shift at will like an Animagus and were generally a benevolent race that kept to themselves. Did they live in packs, or something like that? Were most like Wayne in temperent in their human form, or was he so shy and withdrawn because he didn't have others like him around? Or was that just how Wayne was? If he
truly was a Lythari, how had he come to live with muggles? Had something happened to his birth family? The questions burned in her mind, but she refrained from just blurting them out.

Taking a steadying breath, Pomona shifted in her seat to look Wayne in the eye. "Wayne, you have nothing to fear from me. If what Mister Skywalker says is true, then I'll do everything in my power to help you with this. I see no need to inform the headmaster of this until you are ready to do so as long as you don't use it to harm or threaten others. Anything you need to understand this, I will strive to do for you." She spoke clearly, hoping that her honesty and determination to help her student came through. Wayne looked up at her wide-eyed, his grey eyes glassy and his mouth slightly open in apparent shock. Pomona only stared into his eyes until the boy's face cleared into understanding and he gave her a small nod of acceptance.

Pomona straightened out in her seat and turned to face Loki, whose approval was clear on his face. "Now, tell me everything I need to know."

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Hermione Granger did her best to ignore Ronald's grumbling.

He had taken to whining about Dark Wizards and evil Slytherins nearly the whole way to the Hospital Wing, constantly rubbing his jaw as if feeling for anything out of place or wrong with it after that Loki man had touched it.

Hermione almost wished she hadn't followed Neville out into the corridor to see what was going on. But she was curious by nature and had wanted to know what had caused the usually rambunctious Gryffindors to quiet. She probably would have learned more about the mystery visitors if Ronald hadn't opened his big mouth and started accusing people of being Dark Wizards.

Honestly, as bad as the Slytherin reputation was, she had thought the boy would have enough sense to not constantly do his best to anger them.

"Geez, slow down, 'Mione," Ronald complained as she picked up the pace when she saw the doors to the infirmary. The sooner they had Ronald checked over, the sooner she could inform Professor Dumbledore of the situation.

"My name's Hermione," she snapped. Oh, she could just kick Seamus for calling her that in the middle of the common room. Now everyone seemed to think it was an approved nickname of hers.

The bushy haired girl ignored the no doubt insults being muttered under the redhead's breath as she pushed open the infirmary doors. She didn't see Madam Pomfrey, but saw the office door and guessed that she was in there.

Hermione led Ronald over to one of the beds and pushed him down onto it as best she could when he was so much taller than her. "Sit here and I'll go get Madam Pomfrey."

"Yes, mum,"

Hermione ignored him again and stalked over to the office door where she rapped sharply on it several times. Through the door, Hermione could hear someone moving around. Seconds later the door practically flew open to reveal a smiling Madam Pomfrey.

"Oh, hello, dear. What can I do for you?" The older witch asked kindly.

"Hello, Madam Pomfrey." Hermione pointed behind her in Ronald's direction. "He needs to be checked over. Someone touched him with magic, though neither of us know what sort of spell it was or what it was meant to do."
Madam Pomfrey nodded distractedly as she bustled over to the redhead's side, her wand at the ready. As she cast the diagnostic scan, she said, "I need you to me all that you remember. The wand movement, the color of the spell, what they said when it was cast." Ronald made to open his mouth to answer, but Madam Pomfrey pushed his closed with her hand. "None of that, dear. The scan shows the spell was centered around your jaw so no talking until I figure this out."

Ronald looked annoyed.

"The man didn't use a wand nor did he say a spell. His hands just began to glow green and he grasped Ronald by the chin." Hermione said, her eyes focused on the movements of the healer's wand. She hadn't read much about healing magic, perhaps she could start on that after she figured out just how those two people had gotten in the school. Romanoff was a muggleborn and the woman had said she was his mother, so she must be muggle. Even if Professor Dumbledore had allowed them entry, she shouldn't have been able to enter the school.

Maybe Romanoff had lied about being muggleborn, though Hermione couldn't think of any reason why he would that. Perhaps lying about being a half-blood or pureblood would make some sort of sense, especially as a Slytherin, but not the opposite.

Perhaps that wasn't really his mother and she had just said that to explain why she was visiting Romanoff. Hermione dismissed that as quickly as the other theory. There was no reason for that lie either. Besides, they had the same startling emerald green eyes and Romanoff had reacted just like a son would when someone insulted their mother.

It had to center around whatever reason Romanoff had ended up in the infirmary earlier. No one knew for sure what had happened, even those in the library at the time it happened, except those directly involved like Romanoff, his friends, and his family, whoever they were.

The man who had introduced himself as Loki Skywalker - a name that reminded her strongly of something that she couldn't quite remember - was clearly a wizard, even if he claimed not to be. He had easily used wandless and non-verbal magic as if it was an everyday thing. Was he the reason Romanoff was at the top of nearly every class when it came to practicals? Did Romanoff have other magical relatives? Had he been born to two muggles, one or both of which who were related to witch or wizard? Hermione had read about some muggleborns who had siblings that hadn't developed magical cores and were referred to as muggles, but were technically squibs. Perhaps Romanoff's mother had a brother or sister who was a wizard or witch and she herself was a squib.

Some squibs, Hermione knew, had more of a magical core than others, though obviously not enough of one to actually be able to use magic that wasn't passive like simple potions or activating wards keyed to their cores. Maybe Romanoff's mother, if she truly was a squib, had a larger core than normal and it allowed to her see and enter Hogwarts much like the caretaker, Argus Filch.

Hermione was brought out of her musing when Madam Pomfrey turned to her and asked about who had cast the spell on Ronald. The bushy haired girl glanced over the healer's shoulder to see Ronald had a magical binding on his jaw, keeping him from speaking.

Hermione turned her focus back to the expectant witch. "The one who did it said his name was Loki Skywalker," Again something about the name seemed familiar, though she was sure she had never met the man before. Seeing Madam Pomfrey's eyes widen partly, Hermione asked, "Do you know him, Madam Pomfrey?"

"Why, yes, I do. He's Hadrian Romanoff's uncle. He and the boy's mother came here to help when it became apparent that something was interfering with the healing process." The older witch didn't say anything more than that, but it was enough, mostly, for Hermione. She tucked that bit of information
away to think on later.

"The woman who was with him introduced herself as Natalie Romanoff, Ro-Hadrian's mother, when I asked them who they were and what they were doing in Hogwarts." Hermione replied, internally wincing at the look she received from the healer at her admission. Perhaps she had let her curiosity and irritation get the better than her and had been a little less than polite to the strangers, but she didn't think she had been too rude.

"I don't suppose they gave you a straight answer?" Madam Pomfrey sounded amused, though Hermione failed to see why.

Hermione shook her head, her thick hair flying around her. "I was going to try to find out, but then Ronald cut in and said a few things that made them all angry. R-Hadrian had to be held back when Ronald said something about his mother being a muggle, though I don't think he meant to sound the way he did." Hermione tacked on hurriedly when Madam Pomfrey shot the redhead laying on the mattress a disapproving look and Ronald sent Hermione a glare.

Madam Pomfrey hmphed and turned back to Ronald. A flick of her wand and an indistinguishable word later, Ronald's jaw was free of the binding. He was moving his now free jaw side to side as if it had been locked for a long period of time.

"So, what did you find?" Ronald asked once he finished working out whatever kinks he thought he had.

"Nothing more than remnants of a spell similar to *patetmentis*, a spell used to help clear someone's mind when they're being over emotional and not acting rationally." Madam Pomfrey answered.

"That's all?" If Hermione didn't know better, she'd think Ronald had wanted to be the victim of a dark spell. Perhaps he did, if only to have the wizard arrested.

Hermione was more interested in the spell. "What sort of spell is that? I've never heard of it before."

"It's technically considered Mind Magic, something notoriously difficult for the general population. You might not have come across it before as the spell because while it's conceptually simple and needs only both enough power and a well organized mind to even be able to cast it half properly it's very draining to attempt it without the proper training." Madam Pomfrey explained. "You'll most likely learn more about cheering charms and the like."

"If it's so hard, how come that Loki guy was able to use it without a wand or saying the spell?"

Ronald cut in before Hermione could ask the same.

"I can only assume that he has both the power and the patience it takes to use such spells, and then some to cast it like he did. The question I have is for what reason did he see the need to use it?" The older witch sent both first years measuring looks.

Hermione pinked slightly while Ronald's whole face turned a bright, embarrassed red even as he scowled fiercely.

Slowly, Hermione explained what had happened when the two of them had followed Neville out of the common room. Not one to mince words, Hermione had no qualms about reporting everything that had happened, on both sides, much to Ronald's displeasure.

When Hermione was finished, Madam Pomfrey only nodded. "I see," The healer put her wand away. "While I don't find myself agreeing the way the two of you went about it, I do understand your reasons."
Hermione let out a breath she hadn't realized she had been holding. She noticed Ronald doing the same thing.

"Of course, you could have gone about it much better. Instead you two confronted unknown adults without prior knowledge about why they were there or what their purpose was outside the Gryffindor common room. They may have been surrounded by several first years, but that doesn't mean they were harmless." Madam Pomfrey continued, leveling a stare at Hermione and Ronald in turn. "I will be having words with Mr. Skywalker about using magic, harmless enough or not, on an unsuspecting minor, rest assured."

Ronald grinned triumphantly. "So, can I go?" Madam Pomfrey sighed but nodded. Ronald didn't waste any time in shooting up from the bed and racing from the room, not even throwing back a thanks as he left.

"Thank you, Madam Pomfrey," Hermione said in his stead. "You wouldn't happen to know where the headmaster is at the moment, would you?"

Albus Dumbledore let out a weary sigh as the door closed behind the now appeased Hermione Granger.

He knew the girl was expecting him to take action for the offense, but even with Madam Pomfrey's report that magic had been used on the youngest Weasley in the school, it would only be a matter of Skywalker saying that he used a relatively harmless charm to calm an irate boy down to keep the confrontation from escalating into an actual fight. And all evidence would point to him being truthful, though Albus believed that he had simply used a spell of convenience and had used the display of wandless magic to scare the young Weasley into backing down. There would be no way to spin it as an attack against a notorious Light family, considered blood traitors by the Dark, as Skywalker had done as he did in the defense of a muggle woman and her muggleborn son, nor could it be used as someone fighting back against the blood prejudice as not only was Skywalker's parentage unknown, he was in the company of several half-bloods and purebloods.

Albus might have tried to use this against the man anyway if the Romanoff woman hadn't fought back against his attempts to find out about the mysterious bond between the mother and her child so viciously. He had assumed that because the boy was muggleborn that his mother would be much like the other muggle parents he had come across in his years. Mostly ignorant and more than willing to simply let any magical matters be left to the magical, with the barest hint of fear and curiosity.

Instead he had met a fierce and educated woman who not only wasn't overwhelmed with their world, had apparently interacted in it for as long as the young Romanoff had his first bout of accidental magic. And she had gotten through the Hogwarts wards! Regardless of her companion having magic, she still should've seen the illusion placed over the castle and fallen victim to the confusion that hexed any muggle that got too close to the school.

Perhaps it was the simple case of the Romanoff boy not being muggleborn but rather squib-born. That would account for how the woman got into the school, for the most part, though something about their entrance still struck him as odd. They shouldn't have even known where it was as neither of them had been students.

Albus' eyes glanced over to the conjured chairs that had been left behind. Skywalker had shown an aptitude for wandless and non-verbal magic and had done so casually. If it hadn't been for both Romanoffs' complete apathy to the display - as if they had seen on a daily basis and were no longer impressive - he would have thought that it was a show of power that had exhausted the man even if he hid it well.
And then for the man to use a simple yet complex piece of Mind Magic to end the tantrum of an eleven year old boy, it only proved to the headmaster that this Loki was even more than he had presented himself as.

If he could get the enigmatic man on his side, perhaps he could finally make a break through in the search of Harry Potter, something else that vexed him.

He had been sure when he had left the boy outside his relative's house that Petunia would find him in the morning and bring him into her home - if only to make sure none of her neighbors saw the oddity - thereby activating the wards he had placed on the perimeter of her property, something she would have only learned when she read the letter. By then it would be too late to reject her nephew as it was Lily's blood that held the wards and it was Lily's blood that tied Harry to his aunt. She would have had no choice but to accept him into her home. Apparently none of that had happened.

Albus didn't understand what had gone wrong. Harry was sound asleep when they left him on the doorstep and the entire street was dark, everyone in their beds. The only ones who knew that he had already taken Harry to a safe location were Hagrid and Minerva, both of whom wouldn't have taken the boy away nor tell anyone well he was. Albus knew that Hagrid wasn't very good with his own secrets - let alone that of others - so he placed a charm on the half-giant to make it impossible for the man to discuss it with someone who didn't already know without Albus' express permission.

Sirius had handed the boy over to hunt down the traitor and was apprehended several days later and immediately thrown into an Azkaban cell. The young wizard may have spent some of that time tracking down his godson and hiding him away but if he had there was no telling what had happened to the boy during Sirius' stay in the soul sucking prison.

Albus could have simply asked the man - as he had never been able to go against him for all his rebellious ways - but the last true Black had disappeared soon after his release, Remus following shortly after. At the time Albus had let it go as he was sure that they both simply wanted to get away from the place where they had lost nearly everything they held dear in one night. Now though, he was wondering if perhaps that had been a mistake.

When the news broke that Harry Potter had failed to show up at Hogwarts, and he was sure that it would, the public would be calling for someone's head. Whose that was depended on the whims of Rita Skeeter who would no doubt be given the opportunity to sink her acrylic nails into the story. He would need something to appease the public and give him more time to search for the missing boy.

He could perhaps make it seem as if he was hiding the boy away to train him for a few more years but that could easily fall apart if he found Harry and the last Potter returned to the wizarding world without any sign that he even knew how to hold a wand.

Using Neville Longbottom was out as well, seeing as no one would believe that the shy boy was the Boy-Who-Lived simply because Albus declared it so. There was no way he would inform the masses about the prophecy and it was far too late to lie about who Tom had attacked in person. That wasn't even including how impossible it would be to get Augusta Longbottom to agree to it. The woman was damn menace when they didn't see eye to eye on something and putting her grandson in the spotlight because of his own folly was surely something they would disagree on.

Albus reached over to his ever present bowl of lemon drops and popped one into his mouth as he thought.

Perhaps he could use Harry as a martyr for the Light. The revered hero of the wizarding world recognized while shopping for his school supplies by a follower of the Dark Lord and tracked down and killed in revenge of their Lord's defeat. The public would be angered that their savior was taken
from them and it would cement their stance against anything or anyone considered dark while those of the darker faction would bump their chests trying to find who did in the Boy-Who-Lived.

It would fall completely apart should the boy ever surface and have his identity verified but if Albus could just find out whether or not Harry was alive he would know whether to use the shaky idea.

Albus sighed. Between the hunt for the last Potter, the mysteries surrounding the Romanoff family and the problem of luring what was left of Tom to the castle with the Philosopher's Stone he had less time than he wanted to figure out how he was going to get into the Potter vault and get the true Cloak of Invisibility, and not the impressive, though ultimately fallible one he had planned on gifting to Harry.

Rolling the lemon drop around in his mouth, Albus pulled out a blank piece of parchment and a dipped quill and got to work.

"Welcome back, Red Hot Habanero," Darcy greeted when Natasha and Loki stepped out of the elevator. "You, too, Fun-Tongue."

"I was under the impression that Stark operated under the title of Name Master," Loki smirked.

Darcy sent a grin back, close to flirty. "He's taken me on as his apprentice. It's fun and full of booze." She let out a dramatic wistful sigh.

Natasha rolled her eyes at them before walking over to the wall next to the large wall mounted flat screen that Tony absolutely insisted needed to be taller than the Norse gods they lived with and placed her palm flat against the smooth surface. Her prints recognized, the signal for a team meeting being sent out to whoever was in the building and had their communicators near or on them.

She needed to let them all know what she and Loki had learned during their impromptu visit to the school. Something about the whole thing had her teeth on edge and she had been ready to pull Hadrian out - Dumbledore's policy on not informing his students' parents when something happened grated on her.

Natasha felt his presence more than anything before she heard or saw him. "How's Bright Eyes?" Clint asked, his tone a mix of worry and knowing. He knew she wouldn't have come back unless Hadrian was okay.

"He's good as new. No scar, no physical therapy." Natasha answered shortly.

Clint blinked. "We'll have to talk to Fury about getting some of those healers into SHIELD. Yucky potion versus having to escape through the vents with a compound fracture? No contest."

Natasha rolled her eyes as she followed her partner to the dining table where Loki and Darcy had already relocated and were apparently locked in a battle of who could come up with the most ridiculous descriptions for everyone. The red haired assassin felt that Darcy deserved several points for calling Fury the 'love child of Odin's eyesight and Heimdall's sheer awesomeness.'

She slid into her seat and waited for the others to arrive. One by one they all clambered in, Thor first, followed by Bruce dragging a distracted Tony, then Pepper and a frazzled Jane who had a pencil stuck in her hair, and lastly a tired looking Sirius and Remus.

Tony snapped out of inventing daze and clapped his hands together the way he usually did to bring attention to him. It irked Natasha how often it actually worked, no matter how loud or crowded the room was. She could admit that while she could draw all eyes to her walking through a room Tony
commanded all eyes to be on him. It was a natural skill honed by years in the media eye and one the genius used to his advantage as much as he could. Clint had once likened the man to a magician - distracting you with the flash and bang while the important stuff happened right under your nose. Natasha agreed.

"First things first, the important business," Tony pointed at both Natasha and Loki. "How many girls has my protege enthralled?"

Natasha narrowed her eyes at the man. "Hadrian is fine. There'll be no lasting damage of any kind. Loki and I managed to find out a bit more about the bond Hadrian formed between he and I the day we found him, which apparently has neat little safety clause that will distribute a fatal or near fatal injury between the two of us to allow for more time and chance of surviving." She turned to the wizards who desparately looked in need of a nap. "Loki can fill the two of you in so you know what to go off of. We've put off researching this bond long enough, I don't want anymore nasty surprises."

"Maybe we should start looking into how Lily Potter knew that 'Hawky' and 'Widdy' would help out her son." Clint added seriously. "Could she have been a psychic and just never told anyone?" He asked the only two who had known her.

Sirius shook his head tiredly while Remus answered. "I doubt it. She would've informed us, or at the very least James if she discovered the talent. And she had always dismissed Divination in school, always said that it shouldn't be an elective class offered to everyone and should've been exclusive to those that had some form of Seeing."

"So unless she got the talent late in her life, she was just a normal witch." Pepper concluded. "God, never thought I would be able to say 'normal witch.' I blame Tony."

Bruce nodded sagely. "We all do."

Tony made an indignant sound. "What are you talking about? Junior's the only one younger than me on this team and Darcy is both a six year old on a sugar high and perverted eighty year old grandma-"

"It's true," Darcy interjected proudly.

"-if anything, Bird Eye's View and I are following in your footsteps. Just like the baby boomers ruined the economy, you ruined my ability to be a total jackass. For shame." Tony finished and tapped one index finger against the other in a tsk-ing gesture.

"Did you learn anything of importance aside from the bond?" Thor asked before the meeting could devolve into who was to blame for everything wrong with the group and possibly the world.

"The wards are weak and stagnant," Loki revealed. "I believe the only thing that's kept them active for so long is the amount of ambient magic from the hundreds of students who stay in the castle for most of the year, along with the more powerful magic of actually casting spells. Other than that, it seems as if no one has taken to updating or weaving new protections into the wards for nearly fifty years."

"Why wouldn't someone update them?" Jane asked. "Do they think that these wards are just going to stay up forever?"

Remus cleared his throat. "The wards were first set in place by the founders of the school, the witches and wizards the houses were named after respectively, and they were considered some of the most powerful magic users since Merlin and Morgana. With the way History is taught and the people
of the British Wizarding World's tendency to focus on the legend and not the man, they most likely do believe that. Even the ones in a position to have access to the wards, the headmaster and deputy, wouldn't see any need to add anything unless they were warding against something specifically, like a new Dark artifact."

Loki nodded in agreement. "As it is, I noticed several small gaps in the weaving, as if the stitches had fallen out and part of it unraveled. If someone were to be able to find such patches and have the necessary power and knowledge, they would pull at the thread until they could quite literally pull the whole thing apart."

Natasha felt the need to growl. Laziness and arrogance on the wizards part was potentially putting her son in danger. And it was cited as the 'safest place on earth.' It made her want to spit at their feet in disrespect. Perhaps it had once lived up to the title - back when the founders were alive and the wards were at their strongest - but inactiveness was going to bite the wizarding world in their collective asses.

They needed to find a way to have a petition to renew and strengthen the wards reach Dumbeldore's hands. If the parents were made aware of the situation and its potential for disaster they would no doubt sign it. The question was if they were part of the problem of allowing the stagnancy, how would they get them to see past their own nose?

Voldemort. Even now no one in the magical British Isles dared utter his chosen moniker out of lingering fear. All it would take were a few whispers here and a few rumors there and the general public would fear that the attacks placed on the school during the war had weakened the wards - not enough for immediate danger or notice - but enough to have far reaching consequences. Parents would call for protection for their children, survivors who had been directly involved in the war wouldn't want for something of that magnitude be left as Voldemort's legacy and the Ministry and Hogwarts staff would practically break their backs in bending over to meet the demands. And it had the added benefit of covering for them if Dumbledore attempted to use their entry into the school against them. After all, it was just another sign that the wards needed to be revamped.

A dangerous smirk danced over Natasha's lips. Of course, they couldn't just leave it to Dumbledore. As great as the man was said to be he had no children of his own and hadn't taught in decades and so was out of touch with the needs of the children. The Board of Governors, consisting of parents or guardians of students attending the school, would happily oversee what needed to be done to insure that the children got the best possibly protection.

Think of the children, Headmaster Dumbledore.

Natasha understood just why her son had taken to Loki's love of throwing his head back and cackling.

Neville replied absently when Seamus and Dean called out goodnights; Ron just ignored them, still peeved they had sided with a Slytherin.

Spelling his curtains shut, and still slightly marveling at how easy everything came to him now, Neville leaned back into his pillow and sighed.

Today had been exhausting. Between being wakened up earlier than he wanted because Seamus had tripped over his shoes and crashed on to the floor, Hadrian's sudden and mysterious injury that refused to heal, the arrival of Miss Natalie and Mister Skywalker who not only got through the wards but had also somehow gotten away with not telling the headmaster how they did it, the confrontation with Hermione and Ron, adding Wayne to their strange little family and learning about his heritage
and the 'battle' between most of them and Mister Skywalker, Neville was amazed that he had even made it back to the Gryffindor dorms, let alone all the way up to his bed.

After they had hugged and said their goodbyes to Miss Natalie and Mister Skywalker, they had walked Wayne back to the Hufflepuff dorms and made sure their voice carried through the entrance so everyone knew that he was one of them now. Even though Wayne hadn't explicitly said anything, Neville recognize the look on the boy's face and how he carried himself. Wayne had admitted in conversation that he had only seen students from his house until he ran into them so it wasn't difficult to narrow down the suspects. Whoever it was knew that Wayne had the backing of half the first year and, for Neville, that was enough for now.

Out of respect, no one had asked anything about the conversation with Sprout or about what exactly a Lythari was. If Hadrian had any idea he wasn't talking, and Neville doubted they'd find anything in the Hogwarts library, at least in the non-restricted section. Seamus and Dean had just shrugged and went with it, Hadrian didn't seem to care at all, Su, Mandy and Terry had been obviously curious but held their tongue and Lisa and Morag had gone as far as to clamp their hands over their mouths to keep themselves from asking questions. Wayne had seemed relieved with the lack of interrogation, telling them that Mister Skywalker was going to set up correspondence between him, Sprout and Wayne to tell them everything he knew and that Sprout was willing to keep the surprise heritage a secret from everyone except Madam Pomfrey, who would need to know if he ever ended up in her care. After hearing that they had all made a silent agreement to not speak of this to anyone not already in the know. Hadrian had fingered his wand and whistled innocently.

Hadrian. Hadrian Romanoff. Hadrian C. J. Romanoff, first year Slytherin and definite proof that the pureblood supremacy was a load of crock.

When Neville had first met the boy, he had been crying pathetically over Trevor and wouldn't have blamed Hadrian - or Lisa and Terry - if they had avoided him after. They hadn't sat together on the train - something that was said to be the basis for nearly every great friendship in Hogwarts - nor on the boat together - he had gotten shepherded into a boat with Hermione, Ernie MacMillan and Millicent Bulstrode. They weren't in the same house - Hadrian even belonging to Gryffindor's long standing rival - and had no obligation to have even the barest of interactions with him. None of them - Hadrian especially - had to befriend him the way they had - so easily and without a second thought.

Inter-house friendships like theirs wasn't normal. Sure, a Gryffindor could be friends with a Hufflepuff or a Ravenclaw could hang out with a Slytherin but not like them. Students tended to gravitate to members of their own house and those that did strike out and had friends in another houses tended to have been friends before they entered Hogwarts or had their friendship fade out through the years. Blood status tended to play a big role in it all as well. So for a pureblood Gryffindor, a pair half-blood and pureblood Ravenclaws, and a muggleborn Slytherin to have a relationship like they did was unusual, to the say the least.

Of course, that was if Hadrian was really a muggleborn.

Neville had had his first suspicion during the sorting. When nearly everyone else in the Great Hall was distracted by Harry Potter not being there, Neville, Lisa and Terry had been watching Hadrian's sorting. Hadrian, who despite being muggle-raised in America seemed to know so much about their secretive and largely xenophobic community. Hadrian, whose sorting had taken the place of Harry Potter's and no one seemed to notice. Hadrian, who had look panicked for the briefest of moments when the hat was first placed on his head. A hat that could read minds, and Hadrian had been worried.

But at the time Neville couldn't put words to his suspicion so he let it go and forgot about it until he
was forcefully reminded of it again. During their first Flying Lesson Hadrian had been the only one other than Draco to have his broom instantly jump into his hand and had taken to it like a mermaid to water. Watching as Hadrian confidently rose above the ground, completely at ease, had grounded Neville enough to not give into his nerves. Madam Hooch had blown her whistle and Hadrian had shot off like a firework, looping and weaving and going much faster than Neville had thought possible on school brooms. A carefree smile had threatened to break the Slytherin's face in half. Madam Hooch had commented with a wistful grin that he reminded her of James Potter during a Quidditch game. The suspicion had wiggled its way back into his mind, almost forming into a coherent thought. And then he had lost control of his broom.

Malfoy still owed him for smashing his Gran's present.

Today, though, he had finally put words to his suspicions. Hadrian Romanoff, coming to Hogwarts in place of Harry Potter, with a beautiful mother with vibrant red hair and distinctive green eyes. Hadrian Romanoff, with his unruly dark hair and bright green eyes that he inherited from his mother, with glasses perched on his nose and a knowing tilt to his lips. Hadrian Romanoff, who spoke of an aunt and uncle who did protecting him on Halloween at the cost of their own lives, both who had apparently attended Hogwarts alongside two of his other uncles.

Hadrian Romanoff, son of a powerful woman with vibrant red hair and enviable green eyes.

Hadrian Romanoff, with the infamous Potter hair and his mother's eyes.

Hadrian Romanoff, son of James and Lily Potter, who had given their lives to protect their son on Halloween night.

Hadrian Romanoff... Harry Potter, the Boy-Who-Lived.
Su Li laughed quietly when she heard her friend mutter about 'damn unnecessary moving stairs.'

"Oh, hush, you know I'm right," Morag huffed. Su rolled her eyes, but didn't deny it. The stairs could be really inconvenient when they chose to drop you off across from where your next class was.

The two of them had decided to spend a bit of their free period to walk around the castle to get more familiar with it, wanting to shed their easily lost first year image as soon as possible. They most likely wouldn't find any of the infamous secret passages for a while but it would be nice to be overly cautious about where they were going.

Morag had come up with the idea after seeing how many of the older students seemed to unconsciously take the shortcuts they had discovered. They had asked about it but the only answer they got was that finding your own routes and paths were a Hogwarts tradition. Su was starting to think all these Hogwarts traditions sounded like they were designed to mess with the heads of first years.

"Do you think that each house has different routes? I read that some people think Hogwarts is at least partially sentient and that the founders embedded their magic into the castle, so maybe the castle reacts differently to students of different houses." Su theorized.

Morag paused in thought. "Maybe. Never seen people from two houses come from the same secret path, so it's possible. How could we find out for certain?"

"We could-"

"Li, MacDougal,"

Su and Morag stopped at their names, turning in place to see Nina Zadi and Celia Gianchetti, fourth year Ravenclaws. Leanne had warned that they had a bad habit of sticking their noses into other people's research projects - which they claimed was only out of curiosity - before using whatever information they learned to show off in front of Professor Flitwick or the other houses. Apparently with each year that passed more and more of the eagles caught on to what they were doing so now they were stuck using only the most trusting of Ravenclaws and first years who didn't know anymore. It was unfortunate for them that Leanne had told Lisa and Terry who had told the rest of them in turn.

"Yes?" Su didn't see why the older girls were bothering to talk to her and Morag. Even if they hadn't been warned about their tactics they had no sort of research going on other than mapping their way through the school.

"You two are part of Romanoff's little group, right?" Nina asked, crossing her arms over her chest and looking down her pointed nose at them.
"We're friends with him, and sometimes join his study group if that's what you mean." Morag answered a little warily. Su didn't blame her. Ever since Miss Natalie had shown up, Lisa, Neville and Terry had been interrogated by anyone who could catch them without Hadrian around. No one had tried to question Hadrian himself about it, at least as far as Su knew; the Slytherins might have asked, but they at least could wait until they were out of sight instead of cornering first years outside of their class.

Plus, Su didn't like the way Nina referred to Hadrian, Lisa, Neville and Terry, the ones who were truly part of his 'little group.'

"Why?" Su added, though she was almost certain she knew the reason.

"We were just wondering if you knew anything about how his mother got in. It's got everybody at least a bit curious," Celia smiled as if sharing a joke with her friends, tucking her curly, dark hair behind her ear.

Su and Morag shared a knowing look. Though Celia appeared the perfect picture of someone merely curious - something Su was sure was behind the reason people were willing to share information - Nina had unintentionally ruined the friendly affect they were going for with her dismissive tone.

"Well," Su started as she turned back to face the older girls. "We didn't really ask. Hadrian seemed to know how and the professors seemed to be okay with it, so we just didn't think much about it." That wasn't entirely true. Su had wondered endlessly about how they got in through the wards, but like with Wayne, she held her tongue. And if she gave in to her curiosity and asked Hadrian about it and he didn't give her a straight answer, then her first research project could be about the Hogwarts wards.

There was obvious disbelief on the older girls' faces. "Really? You didn't ask once?" Nina's voice was higher with incredulity.

Morag shrugged. "There wasn't any reason to." A small smirk appeared on the first year's face. "Besides, if we really want to know, we could just figure it out ourselves. We are Ravenclaws, after all."

Su bit back her laughter. "Yeah, and it'd be fun to be the first ones to figure it out."

A gleam entered Nina and Celia's eyes. They said half-hearted goodbyes and see-you-laters before hurrying off, whispering excitedly to one another.

Su and Morag smiled at one another before turning back around and continuing their exploration.

Neville winced at the sinister hissing sound emanating from his cauldron. He had been distracted from his work, too busy stealing curious and thoughtful glances toward his completely at ease friend. Hadrian, while he would probably never be a Potions Master, had years of study already under his belt as Potions had been one of the passive magical classes at his school. Between actual lessons on why one stirred left or right, the several ingredient preparations being explained, and practice through making simple and less volatile potions firmly cemented Hadrian as the second top student in the Gryffindor-Slytherin mixed potions class. Malfoy actually took first place - having come out of nowhere in the class standing not long ago -though Hadrian and Hermione sometimes gave the blond a run for his money.

Neville himself normally toed the line of average, his nerves warring with his knowledge of Herbology. Hadrian's presence usually helped anchor him, but today was one of the days they
worked on their own so he was left to himself with his potion and his thoughts.

Figuring out who Hadrian really was was both a blessing and a curse. It was pleasing to know that the Boy-Who-Lived was happy and safe with a loving family, like Dumbledore had promised all those years ago. And Neville knew that Hadrian was probably happy to know that all his friendships were real and not born out of hero worship or fame seeking. But at the same time Neville knew this secret would rock the British Wizarding World if - when - it ever got out. There would be outcry about the 'Saviour of the Light' being placed in Slytherin, people either wanting him to be resorted or accuse him of being Dark. The alliances Hadrian had managed to make within the snake den would weaken or break and he could possibly be in danger by the older students with a grudge passed on to them. The other houses would be even more adamant about knowing him, now for being the Boy-Who-Lived and not the mysterious muggleborn. And the headmaster obviously didn't know who Hadrian really was, or he wouldn't have been so surprised about Hadrian's family, so even though his promise had been kept, it wasn't because of him. That meant that Dumbledore either had placed Harry Potter somewhere and never checked on him and Harry found his way to Miss Natalie and became Hadrian or had nothing to do with Harry Potter's placement after that night and lied to everyone to keep people from rioting.

Neville was mostly sure that Hadrian knew who he really was, explaining why he had not only been invited to Hogwarts, but why he decided to attend. It hadn't been because his aunt and uncles had attended, it was because his birth parents were alumni of the school.

Neville could only guess that his uncles 'Siri' and 'Remy' were Sirius Black and Remus Lupin, best friends of James Potter, along with Peter Pettigrew. Neville knew that much from the photo albums his parents made and his mum's journal. His Gran had informed him about Sirius being freed from Azkaban months into his false imprisonment when she was teaching him about the family heads and heirs, especially as after Draco Malfoy and Harry Potter Neville would be the next in line for the Black inheritance. The last true Black had disappeared shortly after his release, along with Remus, and no one seemed to have heard from either of them again. Neville wasn't even sure that Sirius' trial had been made public so perhaps everyone thought he was still a traitor and in prison.

If Siri and Remy were who he thought they were then it stood to reason that Hadrian knew about his birth name and heritage.

Now that he knew what to look for Neville could clearly see that Hadrian was the son of Lily and James Potter. The infamous Potter hair, Lily's famed green eyes, and the glasses that every author who capitalized on the grand story of the Boy-Who-Lived had given him for some reason. Neville could say a lot about those writers, but they all got something right at least.

Neville was a bit surprised that no one else had caught on, like the teachers who had known and seen the Potters on a near daily basis for seven plus years. McGonagall remembered every Gryffindor that had been in her care and Flitwick must have had some sort of relationship with Lily, who had been on her way to claiming a Mastery in Charms. He didn't know about Sprout, but Snape would've gone to school with them, might have even been in the same year. And Neville knew that the Potters had been part of an organization Dumbledore ran during the war. Someone surely should have noticed the resemblance that he had and connected the dots.

Maybe they didn't see it because they didn't expect to see it. They expected Harry Potter to arrive, not Hadrian Romanoff, and it threw everything off course. Maybe they trusted the headmaster when he said he knew where Harry Potter was and didn't look further into it. Maybe they had noticed, but dismissed it as ridiculous.

Whatever it was, Neville wasn't going to say or do anything that would make it obvious until he
talked to Hadrian.

But he had no idea how to go about it. He didn't know whether to try to be subtle in the approach and hope Hadrian caught on or round up his Gryffindor courage and just blurt it out.

He had so many questions running through his head that it was making him dizzy. How did Hadrian end up in America? Did Miss Natalie find him in the UK and take him back with her? Or did Sirius and Remus find him after Sirius was released and escape to the States where they came across Miss Natalie? Was Miss Natalie a relative of Lily Potter? Was Mister Skywalker a distant relative of James or Lily? Had Hadrian been blood adopted by Miss Natalie and given her eyes or were they Lily's? Was Hadrian going to leave Hogwarts if he found it wasn't worth it? Would he leave if his identity ever became known? Did he plan on letting anyone know or was he going to just let everyone live in ignorance unless they found out themselves?

A dangerous hissing sound caught Neville's attention just before he felt something hot and slick land on his exposed hands. With a cry of pain, he fell back, rubbing his hands down his robes frantically to get whatever concoction he had managed to cook up off of his skin before something bad happened.

The burning hot liquid was a deep purple and as thick and slow as syrup, but other than the initial burn nothing seemed to happen. Either he had gotten lucky today and had accidentally made a completely useless potion or he was about to turn into a girl.

"Longbottom, you insufferable fool!" Neville really should've expected Snape's harsh voice, but he jumped in surprise anyway.

The professor's yell caught the attention of the other students who all turned to stare at him. Neville felt his face heat up in embarrassment. He hadn't screwed up this bad since their first potion class, Lisa, Terry, and Hadrian made sure of that. Some of the Slytherins were chuckling behind their hands, though Neville noticed it was really only the usual suspects, Malfoy, Crabbe, Goyl, and Parkinson. Zabini didn't seem to care and Nott looked amused, though probably more at the fact that Neville was covered in purple goop than him being reprimanded. Daphne, Tracey and Millie were just looking at him in confusion like Hadrian was. Lily's eyes were round in surprise. Neville's own housemates looked worried, confused, and surprised, though Ron's face had gone red as he glowered hatefully at their professor.

"You okay, Nev?" Dean asked, actually cutting Snape off. The other students stared in shock at Dean's foolishness or bravery. Either way, he definitely belonged in the house of lions.

Neville looked down at himself. The failed potion still hadn't done anything except make him look ridiculous. "Y-yeah, I think." He turned to look up at the glaring Snape. "S-sorry, Professor. I'm j-just a bit... distracted." He couldn't stop himself from glancing over at Hadrian. It was less than a second, but he knew that Snape had caught it.

"Are you incapable of following the simplest of directions or has it been bred into by the dunderheads you call your housemates?" Snape snarled. All the Gryffindors in the room frowned at the insult, Ron looking ready to leap at the professor, while Malfoy and his ilk laughed outright.

Neville noticed Hadrian's eyes narrowing at their professor and just knew that even if the man was his friend's Head of House, he wouldn't be safe if he kept insulting Hadrian's friends.

He kind of wanted to see it.

"Perhaps Neville should go to the infirmary. We don't know what went wrong, after all." Hadrian
spoke up, his voice even.

Dean stepped forward, Seamus just a step behind him. "I'll take him." The dark-skinned boy said before moving to take Neville by the arm and led him out of the room.

"What's up with you today?" Dean asked after the door slammed shut behind them.

Neville didn't know how to respond. He couldn't tell the truth, the complete truth any way, and he was a terrible liar. "Just a lot on my mind." He ducked his head.

"Mhm," Dean didn't sound like he believed him and Neville didn't blame him. "Is it something we should worry about? Or can you deal with it on your own?"

It struck Neville that Dean was probably the most intuitive of their strange little group, if not just laid back and casual about most things. Neville knew if he told the boy that it was something he needed to deal with on his own, Dean would just nod and go along with it.

So he did and Dean nodded.

Now if only he didn't feel like a liar.

Severus' dark eyes closed almost the second the last student left his classroom.

Merlin knew that if there was anything he regretted more than being the cause of Lily's death it was being stuck dealing with ignorant children who wouldn't be able to tell the difference between dragon's breath and dragon dung if it bit them on their arse. He wondered if there would ever come a day where he didn't curse Voldemort, Dumbledore, and his own selfish stupidity.

He doubted it.

His only reprieve through the years were half decent students who learned quickly what was likely to set his temper off. They were usually Slytherins and Ravenclaws, though occasionally a Hufflepuff or Gryffindor would stand out among their dunderheaded housemates.

This year marked an usually high amount of non-idiotic students within all houses, each of his first year classes all having at least three students who made above average potions.

Susan Bones, Sally Anne Perks, Terry Boot, Michael Corner, Lisa Turpin, Hermione Granger, Draco Malfoy, and Hadrian Romanoff.

As they had been raised in the wizarding world by all formidable or at least competent witches and wizards, Bones to Malfoy weren't too much of a surprise. Granger was well on her way of making a name for herself as spending more time with her nose in a book than Ravenclaw herself so he hadn't been so much as blinked when her first potion came out half way decent.

And Romanoff.

Romanoff, who was apparently a muggleborn but had at least two magical uncles and contacts in the Goblin Nation. Romanoff, who was apparently London born and New York raised and seemed to know more about Hogwarts than some seventh years. Romanoff, who was apparently muggle raised and yet had Slytherins in all years in his corner.

Romanoff, with Lily's eyes and her temper and her brilliance.

He would never admit it aloud but it had stung to see Romanoff's mother in all her fiery hair and
startling green eyes and her presence that seemed to fill the room. A woman who broke into Hogwarts, one of the most secure places in the wizarding world, without so much as a by your leave because her son had been hurt. A woman who wasn't cowed by Dumbledore's reputation and air of contradicting self importance and humbleness. A woman who met the family Romanoff had made for himself and had accepted them without a bat of her eye.

A woman Lily would have been proud to be friends with.

He had never been one to dwell on too many what ifs and what could have beens, he lied to himself, but he sometimes wondered if Lily and Natalie Romanoff would have been friends if thing had gone differently. Would their sons had gotten along? Of course this line of thinking soon made his head hurt and his eyes sting so he let the thought go.

Severus found that he thought about Romanoff and his friends more than he should. And wasn't it telling that everyone always referred to the strange group as Romanoff and his friends. It was Romanoff's group of friends, Romanoff's study group.

It was the general consensus that Romanoff ran the show and the others just followed him around like ducklings that imprinted on him, though Severus had no doubt that the Turpin girl would hex any one who said as such and Boot would smack Romanoff upside the head if he ever let it go to his head.

Severus knew that despite the attempts of gossip mongers and brown nosers no one had been allowed into the inter-house study group other than the quiet Hopkins, who seemed to have been adopted during Natalie Romanoff's visit which was rapidly reaching infamy. They sometimes studied with the smaller groups of the Ravenclaw girls and the Slytherin girls, though it seemed different than when it was just the originals.

Severus snorted. Merlin, he sounded like one of the gossiping Hufflepuffs.

However, it was true. Boot, Finnigan, Longbottom, Romanoff, Thomas, and Turpin. They had added Hopkins to the fold, but it wasn't the same. The Hufflepuff kept to himself, speaking mostly only to Romanoff and Thomas unless spoken directly to. And even then Finnigan and Thomas were much of their own thing while the other four slowly took over the castle.

The Potions Master would like to think he was exaggerating, but it wasn't even Halloween yet and they were already well on their way of breaking centuries of rivalry and mistrust among the houses. And it didn't even seem to be their intended purpose. Like a Slytherin openly being friends with a Gryffindor and a Hufflepuff, a Slytherin who himself was a muggleborn, was perfectly normal and everyone who didn't think so needed to get their heads out of their arse and look outside.

A muggleborn had taken on the Malfoy scion and won and his throat hadn't been slit in his sleep. In fact, the majority who had witnessed it had sided with the muggleborn when before they would have supported the Malfoy heir if only out of principle.

Gryffindors, one of them a legacy and another a muggleborn at that, hung around a Slytherin freely and under their own volition and for the most part weren't crucified by their own house.

A muggleborn Slytherin, snake charming Gryffindors, a Hufflepuff more loyal to other houses than his own. It was strange and surprising and this side of a revolution.

Severus was sure that someone would have stepped in to stop the change by now if anyone else had realized what was going on. It wasn't subtle, everyone's eyes were on them, but they made it seem so easy and normal that people looked past everything except what they wanted to see.
But it was only a matter of time before someone else caught on. Lucius would learn soon of the Incident, if he didn't already, and though he would take Draco to task for his failure, the proud peacock of a man wouldn't allow the insult to his family go unpunished. Severus could admit to himself that he was actually eager to see the showdown of Lucius and Natalie Romanoff.

It would be a bloodbath.

Everyone was buzzing with excitement as they made their way to the Great Hall.

Hogwarts' Halloween Feasts were legendary across the British Isles. Rumor had it that they had once been even more extravagant with spirits of past witches and wizards called to their plane for conversation and story and song that could only be sung by someone from the Olde Times. Of course that tradition had been thrown aside when it was deemed 'Dark' under the new by laws of an upstart Minister of Magic who was trying to make a name for himself.

Hadrian spotted Lisa and Terry sitting at the end of the Ravenclaw table closest to the staff table, Neville doing the same at the lion's table. Though they usually sat together during meals, and sometimes managed to drag Wayne into sitting with them as well, tonight they were willing to sit at their own respective tables. That didn't mean that they wouldn't sit in the best possible place for them to pass on messages to each other and as Hadrian was unofficially required to sit at the end of the table with the other first years, the others had done the same.

While the Slytherins usually sat based on year and then broke down into who knew who, holidays called for something a bit more formal and based in heirarchy. The first years sat at the end closest to the staff table, the second years next to them, and so forth until they reached the seventh years farthest away from the teachers. It showed that the distance between the staff and the older years as well as providing a vantage point that let the seventh years see everyone.

Hadrian thought it was a bit much, but he had been to Asgard and had seen the power and lineage driven seating arrangement they employed so he wasn't going to say anything.

As Hadrian sipped at the overly sweet pumpkin juice, he tried looking at all the Great Hall's decorations to distract himself from his homesick thoughts. He had told his friends about his usual Halloween traditions; Uncle Bruce's chocolate chip pancakes in the shape of cats and witch hats and ghosts, Uncle Clint dragging him to as many haunted houses on the list JARVIS would make as he could, Auntie Darcy stuffing him in whatever costume she had been working on the entire month and then setting on him like the paparazzi that followed Uncle Tony everywhere. He would go trick or treating with whoever had the time, sometimes starting with one and being passed to another when something came up. One year they had all been called away because Dr. Doom decided to be annoying again so they had to have a redo the next day. He dressed up again and went trick or treating in most of the departments of Stark Industries and SHIELD.

He could neither confirm nor deny that Director Nick Fury had dressed up as a pirate, parrot and all.

A smile tugged at his lips. Any embarrassing stories of Uncle Nick were treated as a matter of national security, with blocked out files and security clearance, the whole shebang. Hadrian was pretty sure actual matters of national security were less classified than the story of Uncle Nick playing Star Wars with Hadrian, Clint, and an over enthusiastic Maria.

Halloween night usually ended with him in tucked into his bed and surrounded by his mom, Uncle Clint, Uncle Sirius, and Uncle Remus. They would take turns telling him about his birth parents, Uncle Sirius delighted in telling Hadrian all the embarrassing ways his father had tried to woo his mother, and what he had been like as a little kid, both before that one horrible Halloween and after.
Through some unspoken agreement, they had decided that Hadrian would never have a bad Halloween again if they could help it.

He liked to think they were doing a pretty good job.

But this year was different. He hadn't woken up to the smell of chocolate and pancakes and apple cider. There were no haunted houses to creep through, screaming at the wrong times and laughing when monsters jumped out. There was no trick or treating and no one dressed up in costumes. He could video call home before he went to sleep, but it wouldn't be the same. Maybe Uncle Loki was home and could come pick him up to let him visit for a bit.

"Hey, Romanoff, what's got your head in the clouds?"

"The thought of selling my soul for a decent cup of chocolate milk." Hadrian said dryly.

Theo blinked. "What the hell's 'chocolate milk'?"

It was Hadrian's turn to blink. "Seriously? You guys don't have chocolate milk? No wonder the lot of you are so uptight and pretentious. You're being denied mortal safe ambrosia." No wonder so many first generations returned to the non-magical world after they finished their schooling. Magic was grand and wonderful and all that, but no chocolate milk or WiFi? There should be hazard pay.

"Get over yourself and pass me the gravy." Theo demanded. Hadrian rolled his eyes but did as he was told. And if his hand happened to shake and spill some of the thick, sausage gravy onto Theo's robes, it was a total accident.

Honest.

Hadrian sighed as he took a drink of his warm apple cider.

He didn't know why he consistently forgot to just ask the house elves that worked in the kitchen for things he liked. He had been half way through his pumpkin juice when he remembered about the little, energetic creatures.

"So muggles actually dress up as witches and wizards and go from house to house for candy?" Blaise sounded disbelieving. Hadrian nodded, hiding a smile at how the very idea seemed to confuse the dark skinned boy. "Muggles are insane. No doubt."

"I'm sorry, which society regularly sticks their heads into a fire to communicate?" Hadrian asked.

"What else would we use?"

"Cell phones," That answer only earned him confused looks from Blaise and Theo. "Oh, dear Odin, I have my work cut out for me."

Just as he was rearing up to give the simplest but in depth of explanations about cellular phones - living with Tony Stark had some perks after all - the large doors to the Great Hall slammed open and Quirrell stumbled in with a clearly frightened expression etched onto his face.

"Troll! Troll in the dungeon!" The defense instructor called out, fear lacing his words. "Thought you all would like to know,"

And then he fainted.

As panic fell over the crowded room, Dumbledore stood up and gave a sharp wave of his wand, a
resounding crack echoing through the room drew all attention to the grim faced headmaster.

Hadrian could only let his jaw drop in shock as Dumbledore ordered the prefects to lead their respective houses back to their dorms, wondering if he was hearing correctly or if the old man had gone senile.

In his shock Theo managed to grab him by his arm and lead him away from the table and out the the Great Hall. Though the first years were the last to exit the hall because of their seating, the sixth years had stopped at the door and let them pass so that the older students would bring up to the rear. The fourth years and up all had their wands out, prompting the students from other houses to do the same. Hadrian felt a small measure of relief fill him at that. He wasn't the only one who remembered that the Slytherin dorms were in the currently troll filled dungeons.

As they carefully made their way through the corridors, Hadrian did his best to corale all the first, second, and third years together in a huddle between the older years. Malfoy, Crabbe, Goyle, Parkinson and a few others in the higher years resisted his attempts.

They had just rounded the corner that led to the Slytherin dorm entrance when something foul smelling permeated the air.

The Slytherins stopped and turned as one to see a great giant with filthy green skin and a large pelt wrapped around its waist lumbered around the corner, a giant club in its grip trailing along the floor. It caught sight of them and roared.

Hadrian felt his hands shake as his housemates screamed in panic and terror. The fourth, fifth and seventh years were pushing through the younger students to put themselves between them and the troll while the sixth years all raised their wands, the tips lit with unspoken spells.

"Run to the dorm! Don't stop, don't look back, and for Merlin's sake, don't be a Gryffindor!" Lathaniel commanded.

"First years up front!" A third year Hadrian thought was named Calliope ordered, shoving the youngest towards the dorm.

None of them needed to be told twice. They all took off as fast as they could, most holding their robes up so they wouldn't trip. Hadrian easily passed them all and was the first to reach the entrance.

"Ouroboros! Ouroboros!" Hadrian shouted the password desperately, doing his best to ignore the roar reverberating off the walls and the panicked casting of spells. "By the gods! Ouroboros!"

The entrance slammed open, seemingly responding to the urgency in Hadrian's voice, clipping the boy and knocking him down in surprise. Lily raced past him into the dorm and Hadrian saw the door beginning to shut close after her. Hadrian grabbed the edge of the door and pulled it back to keep it open, digging his heels into the ground.

"Romanoff, what are you-"

"Go inside! We don't have time to keep repeating the password!" Hadrian cut Daphne off. Tracey didn't waste time and grabbed her friend's hand to pull her along.

Just when the last third year entered the dorm Hadrian risked a look back at the older years fighting a troll. The seventh and sixth years had taken the forefront and were constantly shouting off spells that either missed or didn't have enough power to cause any damage, few of them both hitting and having any affect on the club swinging creature.
He saw a boy with golden brown hair he didn't know the name of barely jump out of the way of the troll's wild swing of the club, knocking his head against the wall.

"Fourth years, go!" Someone shouted over the cacophony of noise. Said students immediately began backing away - their wands still pointed out - before they turned on their heels and ran. Hadrian caught a few looks of surprise on their faces as they ran past him and into the dorm.

"Romanoff, don't be a hero! Get your ass inside now!" Hadrian nearly let the door go in shock when he recognized Malfoy's voice over the other yells for him to get inside the dorm. Before he could do anything one way or another, there was another shout for the fifth years to retreat.

Hadrian's resolve hardened. He blamed Sirius.

Soon the sixth years retreated, Helena and Fern sending him dark glares as they passed and their voices adding to the mix of people yelling for him to stop playing Gryffindor.

"Just... a little longer." Hadrian muttered to himself. He looked back over at the remaining students and saw that they were retreating in pairs now as the ones still fighting slowly backed away to close the distance they would have to run. The boy that had nearly been taken out by the club had blood running down the side of his face and was being helped along by another.

The strain on Hadrian's arms was growing as the entrance door wasn't meant to be opened for so long and it was resisting.

Hadrian felt someone grab his sleeve and pull him through the rapidly shutting door. "Dammit, Romanoff." Alton's reprimand might have had more effect if he wasn't bent over, his hands on his knees, panting for breath.

Hadrian ignored him and rubbed his aching arms. "Who knew Hogwarts would have resistance training?" He tried to joke, but it must have fell flat because someone smacked in his arm. "Ow! Millie, my arms are already ready to fall off, they don't need your assistance."

Tracey smacked his arm next. "That's what you get for being stupid."

"No more hanging around Longbottom. He's infected you," Daphne added imperiously.

"Funny, Dean and Seamus say the same thing about me with Neville."

"What's your problem, Romanoff? You could've died if that monster had gotten through and you're just laughing about it?" Malfoy suddenly shouted, his face pale from fright but rapidly filling with red in anger.

Hadrian was surprised. "Wow, Malfoy, if I didn't know better I'd think you were worried about me."

Malfoy didn't rise to the bait. "What made you decide to put yourself at risk like that, you idiot?"

Hadrian didn't know how to respond. He hadn't expected Draco Malfoy of all people to get on to him about risking his safety - if anything he expected the blond to chide him for not getting himself smashed into pieces by the troll's club.

Before he could respond there was a sudden thud and the entrance door shook under the force of the troll hitting it.

"Shit! Where the hell is Dumbledore?" Hadrian couldn't help but agree with Marcus. Dumbledore knew the troll was in the dungeons and should've heard or smelled the damn beast by now.
Alton called for everyone's attention. "Everyone, go to your dorms. Fourth years and below will have their doors spelled and barricaded shut by fifth years up before we retire to our own rooms. I want as much distance between us and... that... as possible. No one comes out until day break or Professor Snape or the headmaster give the all clear. Understood?"

Quick nods were given before everyone rushed off to follow the seventh year's directions. Hadrian trailed after Theo and Blaise towards their room, beginning to lose himself in his thoughts.

He couldn't keep this from his mother, he knew that for sure, but if she found out she wouldn't waste any time pulling him out of Hogwarts, giving him a gun and wrapping him up in bubble wrap before locking him in Auntie Maria's office - his missions be damned. Not even Uncle Tony would try going in there.

The thing was, he wasn't sure he if he wanted to leave. Sure, his old school had a better curriculum and he could home everyday to his family, but here he had finally made his own friends. The kind he would see outside of school, not just talk to them during the hours they were sitting next to each other in class. Neville, Lisa and Terry were fast becoming his best friends, and Dean, Mandy, Morag, Seamus and Su were already closer to him than most of the kids back in his old school. He didn't know much about Wayne but he would do what he could to make the boy feel welcome if only for his uncle Loki.

He just needed a way to convince her to let him stay, at least until the end of the school year.

He scoffed. Yeah, he just needed to beat the Black Widow at her own game. Fun.
The week following the troll attack was filled with tense looks and apprehension.

The Slytherins were being rather tight lipped about what happened as ordered by Alton and Snape and no one was willing to ask the headmaster or McGonagall. There were suspicions that Neville, Lisa, Terry and Wayne had been told but if they had they kept it to themselves.

Gregorio Ramos, a fourth year Gryffindor, tried to sneak into the infirmary to get a look at Icarus Jackson - the seventh year who had been injured during the attack - but was caught by Madam Pomfrey before he could catch a glimpse.

Other than the attack itself the only thing of interest were the families of the parents who wrote home about it not believing them. Icarus revealed to his housemates that his parents hadn't come to check on him - which was surprising to everyone who knew the Jacksons, the matriarch especially.

Several Ravenclaws, a few Hufflepuffs and one Hermione Granger were spotted in the library reading up everything there was on trolls. They all wanted to know how it was possible for a notoriously dumb creature to get into one of the most magically protected places in the world. They hadn't found anything that would give them answers - if anything what they learned told them that it was all but impossible for a troll to just wander in.

Susan Bones looked up when she heard someone drop into the seat next to her.

"Cedric?" The red haired girl was confused, not understanding why the handsome third year was sitting with her.

"Susan, right?" Cedric grinned.

Susan nodded slowly, still puzzled. "Did you want something?"

Cedric ran a hand through his thick hair sheepishly. "Actually, I was wondering if you could tell me anything about the Romanoff boy."

"Oh, Hadrian?" Susan wasn't particularly surprised by this. Ever since Hadrian's mother, his muggle mother, had stormed the castle after the green eyed boy had been hurt he had been the talk of the school. Between his mystery injury, his mother's visit, and the fact that a muggleborn had, at least for the moment, the Slytherin house on his side, Hadrian Romanoff was a gossip's dream.

It didn't help that by the end of the day everyone knew that both Hadrian's mother and his uncle had torn into the headmaster for apparently trying to interfere with family business. Throw in Wayne Hopkins being added to Hadrian's group of friends and most of the first year Slytherin girls being seen with them out by the lake, and everyone had something to say.

Questions about Hadrian actually being a muggleborn were brought up when Lily Moon, one of the Slytherins seen by the lake, had let it slip that his uncle could perform wandless magic effortlessly.
and his mother actually walked straight into the Whomping Willow and dodged all of its attacking branches with the ease of a snake. Combined with even being on campus with the wards in place helped cement the doubt in most of their heads about her status as a muggle.

Not even the troll attack on the Slytherins was talked about as much, though Susan supposed that had more to do with disappointment that none of them were actually hurt than anything.

She knew that a few first and second years had tried joining the inter-house study groups that Hadrian was a part of, but his friends had done well in weeding out who actually wanted to be part of the study group and who just wanted to get information on the Slytherin. Dean Thomas and Neville Longbottom had made for a particular odd but terrifying combination in keeping gossip mongers away from their friend.

Outside of his study groups and the usual three friends, as well as the new addition of Wayne, that were always with him, Hadrian was often seen with Helena Hoster and Fern Dalton, sixth year Slytherins who seemed to have decided that Hadrian belonged to them and as such should be kept under their watchful eye. Rumor had it that they had sent Ron Weasley to the infirmary for yelling slurs at Hadrian when the boy refused to tell him how his mother got into the school but no one had been able to confirm it.

Susan herself was curious about the whole thing, but she could live without knowing. If Hadrian wanted them to know, he would let them know, and if he didn't, then he didn't. The professors didn't seem worried about it so she figured they at least knew.

"Before you ask, just because we're in the same year doesn't mean that I know anything more about him than you do." Susan said pointedly.

Cedric's brow furrowed in confusion for a second before his face cleared with understanding. "Oh, no, no, no. I wasn't trying to get dirt on him or anything. I just wanted to ask him about something. Not about his mum or how he got hurt, though." he added hurriedly.

Susan leaned back in her seat, setting down her quill. "What did you want to ask him then?"

"Well, I heard that he was thinking of putting together a defense club as a sort of independent study and was looking for older years who could help out with it." Cedric explained. "Not that I blame the kid. Merlin knows Quirrell came back from his sabbatical as jumpy as a Chocolate Frog."

Susan nodded. Most everyone knew that Hadrian and his friends were approaching a bunch of students of all years about starting an independent defense club to learn about the subject outside of class because Professor Quirrell could barely say his name, let alone teach anyone properly. She had thought about joining it, knowing her aunt would approve.

"You want to ask him if you can join?" Susan guessed.

"Yeah, I mean, I figured it would be the best thing. Quirrell's not going to teach us anything worth knowing and the two defense professors I had before him weren't much better. Self taught is better than learning from someone incompetent." Cedric said.

"Okay, I don't see the problem. Why don't you just ask Hadrian yourself?"

Cedric groaned in frustration, something the redhead had never seen him do before. "I can't get close enough to him to ask. Because of everyone trying to find out about what happened, his friends are being overprotective and don't trust anyone trying to approach them that didn't before it happened. But I know that you've talked to them a few times, so I was wondering if you pass on the message or
at least see if they're willing to meet up to talk about it."

"Why don't you ask Wayne? He's a lot closer to them than I am. Apparently something happened during The Visit and now he's officially a part of their group." Susan reminded the older boy. Only Professor Sprout seemed to have an idea on why Wayne had been added to the strangeness that was Hadrian Romanoff and the Fellowship of Hogwarts.

"I tried," Cedric sounded close to whining, making Susan grin a little. "But everytime I approached him he would get really nervous and run away like he thought I was going to attack him."

Susan hummed in thought. She knew that Cedric probably did have a hard time even trying to get within earshot of Hadrian. Susan figured that his friends wouldn't step down until the whole thing blew over, but until then they were mama bears protecting their cub. "Why don't you write out that you want to join the defense club and ask around for anyone else who wants to join too and have them sign."

"Like a sign up sheet?" Cedric looked thoughtful.

"Yeah. When you're done you can give it to me and I'll pass it off to Hadrian or Lisa or Terry or Neville in class." Susan promised.

A wide grin broke on Cedric's face, making him even more handsome than usual. He suddenly moved forward and wrapped his long arms around Susan in a quick hug. "Thanks Susan, remind me to pick you something up when a Hogsmeade weekend rolls around." He stood up. "Well, I have to go meet up with Julian. See you later, Susan."

Susan raised her hand in short wave, calling out a goodbye after him. She turned back to her Charms work with a thoughtful look. Maybe she would sign up for the defense club, too.

"Hoster."

"Flint."

Helena and Marcus stared at each other, neither giving away what they were thinking. Fern stood off to the side, hiding her grin behind her hand and trying her best not to look like she was finding the dramatic stare down amusing. Helena would never forgive her for ruining the moment.

"We need to speak."

"Of course."

They both wordlessly slid into opposite facing seats of the library table. Fern shook her head before taking the seat on the right of Helena.

Grey eyes regarded Marcus evenly. "Romanoff. Talk."

"He's a Slytherin."

Helena hummed without commitment. Though it might have answered a lot of her unasked question, it wasn't what she was looking for. "He's also a muggleborn."

"And I'm a half-blood." Marcus said harshly. Helena and Fern shared a look at that. Even though it wasn't a secret about who was anything except a pureblood in Slytherin, it wasn't common for them to be so open to admitting it. Marcus was as high in the hierarchy as he was because of his position
on the Quidditch team and the fact that he was surprisingly above average in power, especially compared to his yearmates. The fact was if Marcus was regarded as more attractive and not as prone to getting thrown into detentions as he was he would completely dominate his year. "Besides, we both know there's something more to him and his family. Some of the rumours might be absolutely ridiculous, but something had to everyone's interest. The facts are that a supposed muggle got through the wards, Dumbledore's been seen in the library a few times more than normal, and Romanoff is the middle of it all."

"'Supposed' muggle? Don't tell me you believe she's actually an Acromantula who got changed into a human after attacking a Transfiguration prodigy." Helena drawled, internally laughing at the ridiculousness of it all.

Marcus' brow twitched up in silent amusement. "Of course not. She's obviously a Daoine Sidhe in disguise. It's why Finnigan's so smitten with her."

"And here I thought she was a demi-goddess who's being punished for some crime to live out a lifetime as mortal."

Marcus snorted, the last sign of humor before the situations sobered.

"Malfoy's going to be a problem." Helena pointed out.

"Malfoy wouldn't know where to point his wand if his father didn't show him how." Marcus retorted.

Helena arched a dark eyebrow. "He's also a legacy."

"So are Crabbe and Goyle."

"Romanoff has ties to other houses, including Gryffindor."

"Nearly all purebloods, and two of them the heirs to their family title."

"He's American."

"British born."

"Strong ties to his mother, and as such, the muggle community."

"Family oriented."

"He's eleven."

"He's strong. Look," Marcus leaned forward with his arms on the table, his deep set eyes serious. "You see it. I see it. Romanoff's already got most of his year on his side, including the little firstie snakes. The girls love him, Zabini was born in Italy, and despite his father's allegiance, Nott's an unknown. The other students don't automatically hate him even though he's in Slytherin because everyone knows he's a muggleborn, and the most of our own aren't plotting to smother him in his sleep because he's managed to help the house and hold his own against a legacy. Romanoff is our ticket out."

Helena looked at the Quidditch player in front of her appraisingly. Out of the corner of her eye she saw Fern give her a small nod which she returned. They both stood up suddenly, Marcus following their example.
Helena stalked forward, Fern steps behind her on the right, Marcus on her left. They stopped in front of another table near the front of the library where a certain third year sat.

Fern spoke in her soft voice. "Diggory, we need to talk."

"Brother mine," Fred Weasley greeted as he appeared behind his twin, a knowing lilt to his words. "Yes, brother dear?" George replied in the same tone.

"I heard a strange little rumor about a certain ickle firstie all done up in green trim." Fred said.

"Oh, really? What has he done now? Battle a dementor? Ride a dragon? Convinced our mother that Percy's a right git?" George counted off his ridiculous guesses on his fingers, a grin widening on his pale face. He twisted around to fully face his brother who was sitting on George's bed and twirling his wand around his fingers lazily. "Maybe he turned someone to stone. Isn't he the son of a half-gorgon? Or was it half-basilisk? I personally think that woman's a human phoenix. Did you see her hair?"

Fred chuckled. "According to the unofficial Hogwarts Rumor Mill-"

"-Hufflepuff-"

"-ickle Romanoff and his friends are putting together a club to study defense independently and are looking for older years to help out. And the handsome young Cedric Diggory has this wonderful little sign up sheet for people who want to join." Fred finished explaining with a large grin, showing off the whites of his teeth.

George put his hand to his heart, his light features taking on a surprised countenance. "You mean to tell me people are signing up to have others shoot hexes and jinxes at them? What is the world coming to?" The redhead dropped the mocking look and grinned like a fox at his brother. "I assume with Cedric's involvement and Hadrian's friends that it's open to all houses?"

"It seems that you've not only gotten my good looks, you've gotten my smarts as well, brother mine."

Their roommate and friend Lee Jordan walked into their shared dorm at that moment and then proceeded to slowly back out once he caught sight of their maniacal grins.

Neville watched in amusement as Lisa forced Hadrian to quiz her on Non-Magical Customs.

After Hadrian's mum had kept her promise and sent several copies of the course books, Lisa, Terry, and Neville had immediately added it to their study schedule. Terry had decided that they should share the books with their other friends, causing Lisa to write to Hadrian's mum to send the Magical Customs course books for their muggleborns friends. Wayne would have been there to share Hadrian's pain, but he was in the Hospital Wing getting one of his check ups.

Neville was still trying to wrap his head around the fact that muggles had been to the moon.

"Lisa!" Hadrian suddenly exclaimed as they started up the stairs. "You got a perfect score on the course exam, why are you still trying review?"

Lisa pouted. "I just want to make sure I understand everything."

"Look, if you promise to stop with the sudden quizzes, I'll take you to a bunch of museums and
iconic places when you come over for New Years." Hadrian said.

"Promise?" Lisa pushed.

"Best promise. Now hush, woman!" Neville wasn't surprised to see Lisa flick Hadrian's forehead at that.

Suddenly they were jerked as the stairs started to move on their own accord. Neville saw Hadrian crouch low to keep himself from being thrown off his feet and copied the stance, not wanting to be knocked over the edge of the shifting staircase. With a gesture at the other two, they did the same.

"Where do you think we'll end up?" Terry asked as he twisted his head to try to see if he recognized where they were heading to.

Neville shrugged. Hogwarts was as unpredictable as the Weasley twins, and like with the twins, Neville had given up on trying making sense of the school's sudden whims.

"Uh, guys, you remember when Dumbledore warned us about the third floor corridor?" Lisa said nervously.

Hadrian scratched his head. "When did he do that?"

"At the Welcoming Feast," Neville answered while Lisa shook her head in exasperation. "He said that unless we wanted to die a horrible and gruesome death we should stay away from the third floor corridor."

"So what? He tells a bunch of curious kids with magic to stay away from somewhere and expects them to actually listen? He's insane." Hadrian stated.

"Leanne says that there's not even a notification ward to let the professor's know if someone ignored the warning or just plain got lost." Lisa added.

Terry snorted. "Maybe the teacher's have gotten tired of dealing with the lot of us and hope that stupid ones pick themselves off for them." He turned to Neville with fake sympathy. "I'm so sorry to hear that you're going to lose more than half your house. It's a right shame."

"Shut up," Neville couldn't help the laugh that slipped out.

"Uh oh," Lisa said seriously. The other three turned to see what had the girl worried and paled when they saw that the staircase had stopped at the third floor corridor.

Hadrian straightened up and smirked. "Let's check it out," he said as he stepped off the stairs and into the corridor, looking back and forth for any sign of what could be so dangerous.

"I'm sorry, I was under the impression that Nev was the Gryffindor." Terry snarked even as he followed Hadrian's actions. "Or did that troll knock the Slytherin out of you?"

Lisa and Neville shared a look before following suit. Someone needed to keep an eye on the two of them.

"You know, I really don't feel like dying a gruesome death," Neville commented lightly as they walked, searching for anything strange or out of place.

"We can always push Hadrian in front of us if we see something dangerous." Terry replied with a pat on Hadrian's back. "No one'll blame us for sacrificing an evil snake to save ourselves."
Neville snorted. "Yeah, I'll let you do that and leave you to explain to his mother what happened."

Terry paused, paled slightly, shuddered, and shook his head. "Nah, I'm good. Guess we have to befriend another Slytherin if we need to human shield."

"You know they're sometimes called 'sacrificial lions', right?" Hadrian commented in amusement. Lisa was too busy rolling her eyes and muttering about boys under her breath.

"Cool, how about Weasley?"

"What's he ever done to you?" Lisa asked sarcastically.

"Nothing to me, specifically, but if I have to hear him whine about the Boy-Who-Lived's mysterious disappearance, Malfoy making fun of his family, and Granger annoying him with her 'tips' one more time, my ears are going to bleed." Terry explained.

Lisa laughed a little. "It's not in good taste to plan to use somebody as a sacrificial lamb without at least having a conversation with them beforehand. Right, Hadrian?"

Hadrian didn't answer. Lisa, Neville, and Terry shared a confused look before turning to their American friend who had slowed down with a thoughtful expression on his face. He stopped completely, his friends doing so as well, looking worried.

"Hadrian, mate, you alright?" Terry asked hesitantly. He couldn't remember ever seeing an expression like that on his friend's face. There had been happiness, mischievousness, annoyance, fondness, exasperated, pride, and a particular look of love that Terry had first witnessed with Hadrian's mum had shown up to help him. But never this sort of nervous worry.

"Yeah, I'm alright, uh," Hadrian paused as he tried to collect his thoughts.

"Hadrian?" Neville sounded as worried as the green eyed boy looked.

Hadrian straightened out his already straight tie. "Just thinking, Nev." He shook his head, his dark hair flying around and looking even more unruly than usual, and started walking again. The other three followed after him slowly, still not understanding. "So what do you guys think of Harry Potter not showing up?" Hadrian asked in a forced casual tone.

Lisa shared another look with Terry and Neville before answering. "I don't know. I mean, I was excited when my mum pointed out that Harry Potter was going to be starting at the same time as I was, but I didn't know what to expect. Dad said that after You-Know-Who was defeated, Dumbledore kept telling everyone that he had placed the Boy-Who-Lived in a safe location where he could grow up out of the spotlight without worry of being targeted by You-Know-Who's followers, but no one knows where that was." She explained.

"Same here, mate," Terry shrugged. "I mean, yeah, I thought it would be cool it would be cool to be in the same year as the Boy-Who-Lived, maybe even the same house. I asked around about where's been, but like Lisa said, no one knows where he went after the fall of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named. I know that a lot of people think that Dumbledore kept him hidden away to train him in secret or something like that. Don't have a clue on why he didn't show up at school. I mean, it can't be because he didn't get his letter, right? Dumbledore's the headmaster and was the one who placed him wherever he is so he could've handed it off personally. Maybe he decided to keep Harry Potter hidden away for a bit longer, but McGonagall didn't seem to know that when she called out his name at the sorting." The tall boy shrugged again, not sure one way or the other about how he felt about it. There was a lot of theories floating around the halls, but none of them had been confirmed in any
"You-Know-Who, He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named, Boy-Who-Lived, you magic folk sure do love your hyphens, don't you?" Hadrian said in humor.

"My parents knew the Potters." Neville said quietly, instantly drawing all attention to him. He was looking down at his hands, the way he usually did when his parents were brought up either by him or someone else.

"They did?" Lisa replied in a hushed voice.

Neville nodded slowly. "My dad and mum were Aurors at the time and they were partnered up with James Potter and his partner a lot. And my mum was close friends with Lily Potter when they were in school." The shy boy explained, his eyes turning glassy. He took a deep, steadying breath before continuing. "Lily Potter was named my godmother."

"What? Are you sure?" Hadrian asked, his voice high. He stalked forward and grabbed Neville by the shoulders. "Nev, are you sure Lily Potter was your godmother?"

Shocked at the urgency he could hear in his friend's voice, Neville could only nod dumbly with his eyes wide. "Y-yeah, Gran took me to Gringotts to have their will read when she started preparing me to take over the Longbottom title. Lily Potter was my godmother and Henry Blanckenberg, an old friend of my dad's who died in a raid, was my godfather. Why?"

Hadrian seemed to come to his senses and took a few steps back from the nervous Gryffindor. He shook his head as if trying to wave the whole thing off. "No reason. Just surprised, is all." He lied convincingly.

"Wait," Terry spoke up. "Does that mean you and Harry Potter probably played together when you were babies?" Lisa's eyes widened as she realized the possibility.

"I found a few pictures of in my parent's trunks from when I was a baby. Some of them have Lily and James in them and a little boy my age with James' hair and Lily's eyes." Neville answered, his hazel eyes finding Hadrian's own green ones. An understanding passed between them, something that went past Terry and Lisa who watched on in confusion. Hadrian's eyes widened momentarily before a look of acceptance took over his face. He nodded at Neville who returned it without a word. Neville knew. And he wouldn't tell anyone.

"You feel like we're missing something?" Terry whispered to Lisa who only nodded.

Hadrian cleared his throat. "Well, we should probably get back to looking for whatever's so dangerous. If we're gone too long someone's bound to notice and I don't wanna get caught."

Lisa and Terry glanced at one another, both apparently deciding to let the matter go for now, to Hadrian and Neville's relief.

"You're telling me that you're willing to risk a gruesome death, but you're afraid to get caught in a corridor that's off limits?" Lisa asked, trying to bring back their usual light hearted banter.

Hadrian sent her a thankful smile. "What can I say?"

Terry had taken to opening all the doors they passed, only finding unused classrooms filled with dust and grime covered desks and chairs. Until one door that he tried to pull open expecting to see the same thing again only to almost run into the door when it didn't open like he expected it to. He tried
the door knob a few more times, each time being met with the same clicking sound of a locked door.

"Hey, guys, I think I found it!" He called out. The others rushed over to his side, Hadrian reaching out to try the door himself.

"You think this is it?" Lisa asked, torn between being skeptical and worried.

"It's the only locked door." Terry answered. "Anyone know the unlocking spell?"

Neville shook his head as he spoke, "You don't think it would be that easy, do you? They wouldn't keep something dangerous in the school behind a door that can be opened with a first year spell, would they?"

Hadrian stepped forward and tapped his wand to the door right next to the door knob, "Alohomora," he intoned. There was clear click from the door as it was unlocked.

"I guess they would," Lisa commented, her eyes fixed on the door. None of them moved or said anything, just stared at the suddenly intimidating plain wooden door.

"Hadrian, you open it," Lisa ordered and nudged said boy with her shoulder.

"What? Why me?" Hadrian sputtered.

"Because it was your idea to check it out."

"Yeah, but Nev's the Gryffindor. Noble and chivalrous and all that. He should go first." Hadrian pointed at the surprised Neville accusingly.

Neville immediately turned to Terry. "Terry's the one who found the door. He should open it."

Terry pointed at himself in disbelief. "I'm not gonna do it! And Nev, how could you turn on me so easily. Hadrian's infected you, hasn't he?"

"Maybe you should be the human shield, Boot."

"You-"

Whatever Terry was going to say to Hadrian was cut off by the sound of a door creaking open slowly. The boys turned to see Lisa staring in horror at whatever lay behind the door, her legs trembling, the door knob rattling as the hand still placed on it shook in fear.

"Lisa?" Hadrian slowly moved next to her to see what had her so afraid. His face paled as he took in the sight of a gigantic, three headed dog with midnight fur snarling at them, showing off its three sets of fierce looking teeth. Dribble fell from the mouth of the left head as it snapped forward, Hadrian and Lisa falling back onto the floor as they hurried to get out of its way.

Terry and Neville rushed forward to help them up and froze when they heard the low, rumbling growl coming from deep in the beast's chest.

As one, Hadrian, Lisa, Neville, and Terry opened their mouths and let out ear piercing screams.

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\textit{Boy-Who-Lived Missing!}
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\textit{Saviour Of The Light Lost To The Dark?}
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an article by Rita Skeeter
Boy-Who-Lived Missing!

Savior Of The Light Lost To The Dark?

an article by Rita Skeeter

Yes, my faithful readers, you read that correctly. Early this morning, this reporter was informed of something absolutely shocking. Harry Potter, son of the late James and Lily Potter, defeater of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named, known as the Boy-Who-Lived to the people he saved, is missing!

As you all know, the Boy-Who-Lived was slated to returned to the wizarding world with his arrival at Hogwarts as this year marked his eleventh birthday. Children and parents alike were filled with anticipation at the first sighting of the Hero of the Wizarding World in nearly ten years.

Unfortunately, during the sorting of the new batch of Hogwarts first years, when Harry Potter's name was called, no one stepped forward. Students of all ages looked around the Great Hall in confusion as they tried to make sense of the absence of the Boy Hero. Perhaps thinking the boy had inherited his father's infamous pranking side, Professor Minerva McGonagall, Deputy Headmistress of Hogwarts, Transfiguration Professor, and Gryffindor Head of House called out his name a second time, again met with no one coming forward.

It was soon determined that Harry Potter had never arrived at the school and in fact hadn't even been spotted at King's Cross Station.

That very night, dozens of owls raced through the air as students wrote home to inform their families of the surprising revelation that the Boy-Who-Lived hadn't arrived at Hogwarts and the staff seemed to be just as confused by the turn of events as the students.

Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore, Headmaster of Hogwarts, Order of Merlin: First Class, Supreme Mugwump of the International Con. of Wizards, Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot, and Grand Sorcerer, has been cited several times after coming forward and telling the wizarding world that he had personally ensured the safety of the Boy-Who-Lived by placing him in a secret location to be raised away from the dangers that still lingered after He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named's downfall. He has claimed that Harry Potter was safe and happy and thriving all these years, but now those claims fall into question.

Dumbledore has yet to come forward with a statement about Harry Potter's non-appearance at Hogwarts, though plenty of theories have been shared between the students and their parents.

The question, my faithful readers, is where exactly is Harry Potter? Has Dumbeldore decided to keep him away from the wizarding world? And if he has, when does he plan to allow the Boy-Who-Lived to take his rightful place as member of our great community? Or has Dumbeldore been covering himself all these years and has, in fact, lost our beloved hero? Only Dumbledore and the
for more information on the defeat of You-Know-Who, turn to pg. 4

Severus threw the Daily Prophet down on the staff table in disgust.

He knew it had been only a matter of time before word got out about the Potter brat being a no show, but it didn't mean he had to appreciate the Skeeter woman getting her hands on the story. If something wasn't done soon, and nothing less than the Boy-Who-Lived-While-Lily-Didn't showing up on a golden horse would do, the public would start calling for someone's head. Dumbledore's.

Severus still couldn't believe the man had thought he would get away with lying about knowing where the Potter brat was living. All he had to do was truly check in on him like he said he had throughout the years just once and they would've known the boy wasn't with his relatives like they all thought and they could've spent that time searching for him.

A glance over at the rest of the staff showed that most of them were thinking the same things he was. Minerva still refused to speak to the headmaster anymore than necessary and only then to make passive aggressive comments that would make Salazar himself proud.

Dumbledore, on the other hand, was smiling genially at the student body like nothing said in the article bothered him in the least.

Severus resisted the urge to sneer openly at the foolish man.

The Potions professor's eyes ran over all the students whispering to their neighbors and pointing things out in the article, some of them sending confused or disgusted looks at their headmaster. The Granger girl was scolding her fellow first years for believing the trash, reminding them that the headmaster was a great wizard. The only one who was half paying attention to her was the youngest Weasley boy who was shoveling as much food as he could into his mouth.

Severus found his gaze falling onto Romanoff to see what his reaction was and was puzzled to see that the unpredictable boy hadn't even glanced at the Daily Prophet next to his plate and instead was staring straight ahead. The boy seemed paler than usual and jumpy, starting in his seat when Nott reached over to grab something.

Severus followed Romanoff's line of sight to see that the green eyed boy was looking straight at Longbottom who looked much the same Romanoff did, jumiper and paler if possible. Startled, Severus searched the Ravenclaw table for the boys' friends and found Boot and Turpin huddled together, whispering about something, and sending glances at the other two panicked boys.

Severus' eyes narrowed.

Something must have happened since he last saw them, something that had spooked them all enough to make them ignore their breakfast and the surprise article. Racking his brain for anything that could have caused such a reaction, Severus nearly dropped his goblet in shock when he got his answer.

He had told Dumbledore that bringing that beast into the castle walls on top of that blasted stone would only bring trouble. And then to simply warn off hundreds of children with magic, one fourth of whom were Gryffindors, without taking the proper precaution to ward off the corridor only added to the stupidity.

Now it seemed that one of his own snakes had somehow stumbled upon Hagrid's beast along with
his friends.

"What are we going to do?" Lisa asked as she sat down next to Neville on the ground. Hadrian had passed them charmed notes during their respective shared classes telling them to meet up near the Whomping Willow. Lisa guessed he chose that spot because very few people were willing to get so close to the violent tree, not wanting to chance the reach of its branches.

"What are we going to do about what?" Terry was laying on his back next to Neville, Hadrian on the other side of the tall boy resting on his elbows.

"Oh, I don't know," Lisa drawled sarcastically. "The gigantic dog with three heads that probably wants to play fetch with our bodies?"

Hadrian smirked. "Someone's a bit sassy today,"

"Oh, hush, like you aren't worried about that-that monster."

"You've never been to New York." Hadrian shrugged. "I'm more worried about how my family's going to react to this," he admitted.

Neville looked up in surprise. "You're going to tell them about this?"

Hadrian nodded. "Yeah, I mean, something like this is going to get out eventually and I really don't want to be me when my mom finds out I knew about it and never told her. But with this, the troll attack, and the lack of proper security in general I doubt she's going to let me stay here for much longer," the Slytherin sighed forlornly. "Even though the troll didn't get close to us thanks to the older years, the fact that Dumbledore sent us back to our dorms, which are in the dungeons, when he was told that there was a troll in the dungeons isn't going to be good. And then Dumbledore and the others took so long to show up that the troll actually passed out from all the spells that hit it." Hadrian shook his head and ran a hand through his hair, making it stick up everywhere.

"She's really going to pull you out isn't she?" Neville's voice was low.

"Yeah, and I can't blame her. At least back home she knows that I'm protected."

"What goes on in America that you need to be protected so much?" Terry cut in. "And that you're more worried about your mom than a three headed dog with more teeth than sense?"

Hadrian didn't say anything at first. Technically the events that happened in New York were a very public matter and the only reason his friends didn't know were because of how insular the British wizarding world was and there hadn't been any reason to bring up things like Dr. Doom or Magneto or giant tentacle monsters who were looking for their mother.

His connection the Avengers wasn't well known, explained away by being the son of Tony Stark's most trusted lawyer and having friends in the Stark Industries' Gifted Minds Program, so even if they had known about the goings on back home they wouldn't automatically connect Hadrian to any of the Avengers.

Besides, how do you go about explaining alien invasions and evil geniuses and mad scientists from another dimension without sounding certifiable?

Hadrian shrugged. "I'll explain more if you still end up coming over for New Years. Auntie Pepper will probably have you sign waivers before you get on the plane."
"We're going by plane?" Lisa asked excitedly. "I just figured that we'd use an International Portkey to get there, but this is so much better."

"While Miss Muggle over here fantasizes about planes, do you mind telling me just what could be in New York that we need to sign waivers?" Terry cut in, not looking close to as excited as Lisa did about the idea.

"Eh, maybe I should ask Uncle Tony to see if he can connect my mirror to the news so I can just show you."

Neville's brow furrowed in confusion. "Mirror? What mirror?"

Hadrian's eyes widened a little before he relaxed his face, shifting on his arms to get more comfortable. "What mirror?"

"Just you wait, Romanoff, we're going to get answers out of you yet," Terry warned, pointing an accusing finger at the Slytherin for emphasis. "Once we're in your home you won't be able to hide anything. We'll know everything! About the mirrors, about whatever's made you immune to giant dogs, about your sixth birthday! Everything!"

"I turned six and ate cake! Leave it alone!"

Neville chuckled and shook his head at his friends, catching Lisa's eyes before she rolled them in fond exasperation.

"If you two are done, can we get back to the matter at hand?" Lisa asked in amusement. "Seriously, what are we going to do about it?"

"Can we do anything?" Terry asked. "Would anyone believe us? And if they did, what can they do? Technically only the Hogwarts staff has any say in the running of the school. The Board of Governors is mainly just a peacekeeping thing, let's the parents think they have a say so they don't revolt."

Lisa looked surprised. "Really?"

"Yeah, it's up to the Headmaster and the Deputy to decide if they want to listen to the demands of the Board. The Ministry doesn't have a say either, since it's actually younger than the school."

"If it was Dumbledore's choice to have the dog here according to the Charter, as long as no students are injured he can keep it in the school. He'll probably be persecuted in the papers and everything, but he could." Hadrian added. It would be a public relations nightmare, something he was familiar thanks mostly to Uncle Tony and Auntie Pepper. If it got out that Dumbledore allowed such a dangerous creature to be so close to the students without doing much in the way of protection and warding, the public at large would call for his head. Even a man as respected and revered as Albus Dumbledore wouldn't come out unscathed from the scandal.

"Maybe we could ask McGonagall about it?" Neville suggested after the lull the conversation went on for too long. "We might not even get in much trouble if we just told her the truth, that the stairs literally led us there."

"Yeah, if nothing else it'll probably give her the idea to put some protections up around the corridor so no one else can sneak around there." Terry jumped on the idea. He ignored Lisa's mutter about their conversation being all over the place. He turned to Hadrian. "When are you going to tell Miss Natalie?"
"Probably within in the next few days. If I wait too long and she finds out that I waited, and she will because she's my mom and it's the law, I'll be grounded until Ragnarok." A shudder ran through Hadrian's body. "I'm trying to think of a way to convince her to let me stay here, too."

Lisa raised an eyebrow. "You still want to go to school here? Even after troll attacks and finding a giant three headed dog?"

"Well, even if I get pulled out, you and the others will still be here."

Hadrian tried to wave it off like it didn't matter, but was tackled in a hug by Terry. "You do care! I knew underneath that cold, slimy snake heart there was a scared little boy who wants to be around his friends."

"Ack! Get off of me, Boot!" Hadrian yelled, making a weak attempt to push the taller boy off of him.

"Never! Nev, I need back up!"

"Neville, if you dog pile me I'll hide Weasley's mouthwash for a month!"

Neville smirked. "He doesn't use it anyway!" He proclaimed before jumping into the fray with a battle cry.

Lisa shook her head. "Boys are weird." A smile broke out on her face before she let out her own scream and jumped on Terry's back.

Cedric looked up when he heard the door to the formerly unused classroom open and saw Fred and George Weasley and Lee Jordan from Gryffindor slip into the room with wide grins.

The third years were the last of the expected to arrive, giving the Gryffindors the lowest amount of students in the room. Ravenclaw was the highest, with Slytherin and Hufflepuff nearly equal, though each house had broken off to different sides of the room, seemingly out of reflex.

Cedric turned his attention to where Hadrian Romanoff and his friends were sitting on a long table, talking among themselves. Wayne Hopkins stood on the side of the table, leaning against it with his hip, his arms crossed as he watched everyone silently. At one point Hadrian reached over to grab Wayne's shoulder and shake him slightly, saying something that had the other three laughing while Wayne blushed and knocked Hadrian's hand away.

Out of the corner of his eye, Cedric caught sight of something bright red moving through the crowd. He wasn't really surprised to see Fred and George walk right up to the first years.

"So this is the famous little Hadrian Romanoff," George said in way of a greeting.

Fred nodded. "I see what you mean by little."

Hadrian's indignant yell was lost under Terry's own triumphant shout.

"I am not short!"

"Dude, you're the shortest of us all. Even Lisa's got a good inch on you." Terry laughed. "You must take after your mom."

"Yeah, but it's not as adorable on Miss Natalie as it is on Hadrian," Lisa added with a grin. Hadrian groan and threw his hands up in the air in exasperation, claiming to hate them all.
The twins look like they've struck gold. "So what exactly-" one of them starts.

"-Is the plan?" the other finishes.

The first years share a look before Hadrian just shrugs. "I'm not sure. There were defence clubs back home, but they weren't student run or anything. I figured I could just explain what we did in them and the older students could hash out the details."

"Yeah, like meeting times. We'll have to plan around people's class schedules and Quidditch practices. Not everyone has to be there for every meeting, but there will have to be a teacher approved older year for each, otherwise it's just a bunch of kids throwing jinxes at each other." Lisa continued, her thin eyebrow furrowing together in thought.

"Plus, we need to set up a room or two." Terry jumped in. "Clear them out, put some protective charms, well, everywhere, things like that."

"We should ask Madam Pomfrey and Professor Snape for healing potions to keep on hand in case someone gets hurt." Neville added shyly.

"There should be a list put up on what's been covered in what meeting so everyone can know what's going on and not be kept behind." Wayne spoke, ignoring the shocked looks he got for saying anything. He wouldn't look anyone in the eye, shifting his stance to stare straight ahead at the wall.

Hadrian shrugged it off first. "And we need to make sure that each year learns what's appropriate. First years don't need to know cutting hexes."

"Well, yeah," the first year said obviously. "Despite the precedence our reputation has set for us, we are still just eleven years old."

Fred and George raised their brows in sync, but before they could say anything, Helena stepped forward. "So, basically you know what needs to be done, but you'll leaving all the actual work to the older kids?" She crossed her arms over her chest and looked intently at Hadrian.

"Well, yeah," the first year said obviously. "Despite the precedence our reputation has set for us, we are still just eleven years old."

Terry elbows him in the ribs. "Eleven year olds don't say things like 'the precedence our reputation has set for us,'"

"Well, they do now." Hadrian said. "A lesson plan needs to be set up, especially for the fifth and seventh years so that everyone learns what they need to for exams."

"We can use your defence textbooks from your old school, right?" Neville asked, mostly in show.

Helena turned to face Hadrian fully. "How could a defence book for a ten year old help us?"

"Because my old school is public, they don't receive tuition from the students so to save money one of the administrators came up with a charm for the textbooks. It can tell the reader's age and magical maturity and only shows what's been deemed appropriate for that criteria, so instead of having to buy new books every year for each grade, they just update themselves." Hadrian explained before Terry or Lisa could jump in. They had both been excited to find out about the charm system his old school used, so much so that Hadrian had called home for someone to send the magazines and newsletters that had articles about it and its creator. Hadrian didn't think it was the right time or place for one or both of the Ravenclaws to go into detail about when it was created, what its other uses were for, and so on. He could always set them loose on Wayne later. "I'm not sure how much of the American curriculum matches up with the one here, but it can't hurt."

Lisa hopped down from the table. "With Hadrian's books, what the older years have already learned,
and the books in the library we should be able to put together a comprehensive study plan that'll make sure everyone learns what they need to."

"The first few meetings of the Defence Club will probably just be figuring out how to get things going, who's going to supervise, things like that." Terry added.

Neville glanced around the room. "Who's good at cleaning charms and Transfiguration?" Several hands went up at the question. A sixth year Hufflepuff asked why after they all put their hands down. "Well, we need to find one or two rooms in a good enough place that it won't be too difficult to get to from wherever in the castle and get them cleaned up like Terry said. We can save time by splitting the group in half so one group can get the rooms ready and the other can plan everything out."

Hadrian, Lisa, and Wayne would later deny smiling smugly at the surprised looks the purebloods sent Neville's way, most of them having grown up hearing stories about the almost squib and stuttering heir to the Longbottoms. Terry would gladly tell everyone that he enjoyed seeing them realize how awesome his friend was.

Cedric raised his hand, feeling only a little foolish when all eyes turned to him. "Should we have a name? Or are we just going to call it 'Defence Club'?"

"That's what I've been calling it in my head, but if you want to think up a name that's cool." Hadrian shared a look with his friends then shrugged.

Identical maniacal grins spread across the faces of Fred, George, and Lee, making the students closest to them back away slowly.

"Do I want to know?" Hadrian eyed the trio warily. He asked even though he was pretty sure he equally wanted to know and run far away.

"Well, thanks to our ickle little Ronniekins-" Fred began. His voice was just low enough that everyone had to lean in a bit more to make sure that caught each word.

"-we know all about how a certain little firsties' uncle used wandless and wordless magic to shut him up," George took over, sending a pointed look Hadrian's way. The Slytherin first year promptly tilted his head and smiled innocently.

"And who wouldn't want to be able to do that?" Lee finished, the devious look in his eye reminding everyone of just why he was the Weasley twins' best friend.

"So what name do you have in mind?" Lisa asked when no one else seemed willing to do so.

In a whisper the three Gryffindors began to chant, their voices steadily getting louder with each repetition.

"Knights of Loki! Knights of Loki! Knights of Loki! Knights of Loki!"

Somewhere, a shiver ran down the Allfather's spine.

Clint did his best to back away from his partner in the most casual way possible so as not to have her turn her focus to him.

Natasha was staring down intently at her mirror, her anger practically palpable at this point. They had been in the target room getting some training time in, not playing real life Fruit Ninja as some might
think, when her mirror had flashed to alert her that someone had sent her a message. Once she finished not slicing through a watermelon, she picked it up because the only one who would need to use the mirror to contact her at the moment was Hadrian.

'Uh, hey, Momma,' Hadrian's nervous voice had filtered through the device, instantly putting both SHIELD agents on alert. 'Did you know there was an article in the Daily Prophet about the Boy-Who-Lived? Yeah, apparently this really popular reporter named Skeeter found out that 'Harry Potter' never showed up at Hogwarts. She's calling out Dumbledore to give an answer. It's kind of hilarious.' Hadrian paused. 'So... here's the thing. A couple of days ago, on Halloween- and really, what is it about Halloween that brings out all the crazy? Know what? Don't answer that. Or tell Loki I asked.- anyway, on Halloween during the feast there may have, probably, quite possibly have been a troll attack. Who really-Momma, stop growling!- who knows really? It could've just been a mouse... A large, green, dirty, troll shaped mouse with a giant club. Dumbledore told us to go back to our dorms, even though Quirrell said that the troll is in the dungeons and guess where the Slytherin dorms are? Yeah, so we ran into the troll and the older years made us all run to the dorm while they held it off. No one got hurt and the troll actually passed out from exhaustion and all the spells that hit it, so that was cool. Also, on an unrelated note, I would really like to stay here. Okay, that's it.'

There was the sound of Hadrian mumbling something, his words not coming through the mirror clearly. 'I lied. There was something else. Remember the maybe troll? Well, there's definitely a giant, three-headed dog hidden in the third floor corridor behind a door that a first year could open with the unlocking spell. I know this because that's what happened! So anyway, yeah, there's a demon Clifford in the school and no protections to keep any curious students away. Dumbledore even apparently warned the students to stay away from the corridor unless they wanted to die a most painful death or something along those lines. If I had been paying attention I would have taken it as a direct challenge. Just putting that out there. Love you, Momma, don't shoot Uncle Clint! I really wanna stay at this school, okay, bye!" He had added quickly before he ended the message.

The mirror hadn't lasted much longer in Natasha's grip, the broken pieces falling the ground and shattering even more on impact. Clint had refrained from making a comment about seven years of bad luck, mostly because he was pretty sure that Bad Luck wouldn't mess with a clearly angry Natasha.

Black Widow was terrifying, but Natasha Romanoff could make seas part.

"Nat?" Clint said cautiously.

"He's not staying there, Clint. It's one thing for him to be around dangerous things where we can protect him, it's another for him to be so far away. He's coming home." Natasha threw the mirror frame off to the side where it knocked over the large bowl of fruit they had been using.

Clint only nodded. "Let's go tell the others,"

Natasha didn't say anything as she stalked behind Clint towards the penthouse. At the moment Tony, Bruce, Jane, and Darcy were the only ones not home, having flown to London to give speeches at some convention that Clint and Darcy referred to as an adult science fair.

"At least you know Hadrian wasn't hurt and trying to hide it from you," Clint tried to break some of the tension.

Natasha settled a questioning look on him.

"Well, I mean, last time you were hurt really bad, Hadrian got hurt too, right? So if the troll or that
dog thing did something to him, wouldn't that have been bad enough for you to get hurt, too?"

Natasha tilted her head slightly, something she would never do in the company of Sirius, Loki, or, heaven forbid, *Tony*. "I'm not sure. I've been too focused on other things to properly research the bond and what it means. JARVIS?" She directed upwards, a habit that everyone barring Tony, Darcy, and Loki fell victim to whenever they spoke to the AI.

"Yes, Agent Romanoff?" JARVIS' clear voice came through.

"Would you mind making a reminder for one of us to research the bond fully?" The red head asked politely.

Clint's head went up. "And see if you can get in contact with Doctor Strange or something? What? The guy knows all about earth magic, even more than Loki, he could help." The archer added at Natasha's raised eyebrow. "Plus, he freaks the crap out of Tony."

"Of course, Agent Barton," JARVIS sounded just a bit amused.

Natasha sat stoically while Clint explained what they learned from Hadrian's message and her plan to pull him out of the school before her son could get hurt again.

"What about the other students? None of them can just be pulled out like Hadrian," Remus brought up. "Not only would the parents have to recognize the danger, and that's even if they were informed of the attacks and that the school is housing a Cerberus, they would have to find another place to send them. Durmstrang and Beauxbatons are the second oldest magical schools after Hogwarts, but Beauxbatons is generally considered an all girls school and the few males they do have attending go through an extensive screening process, and Durmstrang teaches branches of the Dark Arts, something that the majority would object to even if they aren't required. That's not even considering the language barrier."

Sirius jumped in, his eyes bright. "Yeah, and even if all of that is taken care of, the issue remains that the British Wizarding World considers Hogwarts, and Dumbledore to an extent, to be the pinnacle of good and right. The closest they've gotten to shutting the school down was over fifty years ago when a girl was killed in one of the girls bathrooms. The Dark and neutral families will be more open to it, but the Light families will take some convincing." Sirius explained. "I know for a fact that the only way Molly Weasley would allow her children to be pulled out is if one of them died or Dumbledore himself told her to.

"I can even admit that I probably would be one of those saying that Hogwarts was perfectly fine and safe if I hadn't seen the remarkable difference between it and the schools we checked out for Hadrian."

Pepper straightened in her seat, a frown marring her pretty face. "Well, Natasha and I have already started preparing a campaign to get the wards redone at the school, we could use this our advantage. Natasha and Loki's entrance combined with a troll attack, plus knowledge of a giant hell hound hidden in the school will have everyone demanding the wards be brought up to date, especially the families of current students." The other could practically see the gears turning in her head as she thought of ways to spin things in their favor. Being Tony Stark's PA for so long had its advantages.

"And what of the very real danger that is already within the walls? The headmaster was the one to inform the students of the danger of the corridor, so it stands to reason that he allowed the beast to enter the castle. No matter the nature and strength of these new wards, should Dumbledore wish to allow something or someone to bypass them, it will be granted." Loki stated calmly, a look of cool detachment on his face. "I feel, though, that the training group young Hadrian has managed to bring
together will bring more good than a passing grade."

"Come again?" Clint stuck the tip of his index finger in his ear and wiggled it around for show.

Natasha rolled her eyes and reached over to push his finger in harshly, making the archer wince at the forced intrusion. "He means that even if Dumbledore keeps allowing dangerous things to happen in the school, the new Defence Club will be more ready to deal with things than if they were still only learning from incompetent professors," she explained.

Remus sighed. "Unfortunately, a year of actual learning won't make much of a difference if something happens. Though the Slytherins managed to deal with the troll effectively, it was only because they had warning and numbers on their side, as well as the fact that most traditionally Slytherin families teach their children at home. There's no telling what would happen if the Cerberus escaped from its room and found a group of second years. Well, there is, but I'd rather not think too much of it."

"So what can we do? Nat doesn't want Bright Eyes to stay there any longer, not that I can blame her, and without him there none of us have any reason to interfere. And Remus and Sirius may not be technically in hiding, but they still don't want to announce their presence." Clint stated thoughtfully before turning to his partner. "I hate to say it, Nat, but if we really want to help those kids from whatever clusterfuck that headmaster is planning, I think Hadrian needs to stay there for a bit longer. At least until we have enough of a foothold." The archer had hastily when the red haired woman glowered darkly at him.

"Clint is correct. While you and the Lady Pepper have made plans to increase the strength of the castle's wards, they have not yet been placed into action. I fear should you remove Hadrian from the school beforehand, the others will not listen to you and consider nothing more than an outsider trying to usurp their way of life." Thor said evenly, leveling a look at Natasha, not a bit phased by her returned glare.

"So," Sirius spoke up, just a bit of confusion lacing his words, though there was also contradicting understanding as well. "Hadrian stays at Hogwarts until we can force Dumbledore to update the wards and Hadrian can get that club of his into enough shape so that when he leaves it won't fall apart without him? Right?" He looked to Remus for confirmation. The werewolf nodded. The dark haired wizard turned back to the others. "How long should that take?"

Natasha tapped the arm of her chair in a rhythm while thinking of the answer. "Hadrian mentioned that the press has caught wind of the Boy-Who-Lived's non-appearance at Hogwarts and that they want answers from Dumbledore. We could wait for Dumbledore's response, or lack of, before bringing up the weakened wards and dangers inside the school."

"With the already there scrutiny about Harry Potter being a no-show, Dumbledore will have no choice but to listen if he wants to keep any sort of face." Clint caught on.

Remus nodded before adding, "If he doesn't, even some of his more loyal followers will at the very least start looking at him with suspicion and question. Dumbledore may be an icon, but if there's one thing I can say about the majority of the wizarding world is that we put the children first."

"For the most part," Sirius snorted sardonically. Remus reached over to rub his best friend's shoulder in comfort and reassurance.

Clint and Natasha shared a knowing look. The Blacks were lucky they were already dead in the ground.
"Brother, what of the Lythari child you spoke of?" Thor asked.

Loki stiffened almost imperceptibly before he forced himself to relax and hum thoughtfully. "I had plans to teach him what he must know to access and control the wolf spirit within him, as well as his elven side I am sure he does not know the full extent of. With Hadrian being removed, it will seem strange for me to keep in contact with him. Professor Sprout has shown to be trustworthy and understanding of young Wayne's relatively odd situation, but she does not have the knowledge or ability to fully help the boy." The god's green eyes glanced at Remus quickly before falling away. "It would be best to set up a point of contact with young Wayne so that we may be able to communicate without interference. The celebration of the coming year will be best should Hadrian's friend stay the course of visiting."

"How will you teach him to... get in contact with his wolf?" Remus asked slowly. This time it was Sirius who reached out to place a comforting hand on his friend's shoulder.

"While the Lythari are a secluded and insular race, I have met many of them who have reached their full maturity during my travels. From what I have learned, it is much like the process your friends went through to access their own animal spirit," Loki explained with a gesture of his hand toward Sirius who looked surprised. "Though of course there are several differences. I, myself, am well versed in changing my shape and form at will. My own practical knowledge alongside my read information will help in my endeavor." Loki looked vaguely uncomfortable, as did Thor, something that didn't go unnoticed but did go un-commented on.

Loki's eyes bore into Remus' suddenly. "It would be advantageous to have another wolf spirit near."

Remus choked on air. "What good would I do? The closest thing I have to control is the Wolfsbane potion and even that is touch and go sometimes."

"Isn't it obvious?" Loki asked rhetorically. "While your human side has found itself a pack, the wolf still longs to run with its own. Sirius and possibly myself are the only ones capable of fulfilling that want, but both of us could be considered alphas, much like your wolf has become through isolation."

"Is that why there are so many werewolf packs? Because it helps them to have other wolves around?" Sirius asked. He looked more focused and intent than he usually did, his hand gripping Remus' shoulder not tight enough to hurt but enough to remind the werewolf of the contact. "And why Remus looked so bad when I found him after I was released? Because he thought his entire pack was dead or good as dead or out of reach?"

"Those full moons were some of the worse in my life," Remus answered before Loki could.

The god nodded. "Your wolf's pack was ripped away from it violently and it felt the full brunt of it. It has since found a new pack, but it still wishes to give into its base instincts of running and hunting."

Remus slammed his fists on the table, making it shake violently. "You want me to let the wolf out so it can hurt people?" He shouted at the god who met his amber gaze steadily.

"Your accusation falls flat. The forests of Asgard are filled with prey fit for a wolf as large as yours."

Loki corrected.

"Aye, Loki speaks the truth." Thor ignored the fleeting cheeky grin his brother sent him. "I am sure that your wolf will find its peace within those trees."

Remus appeared to be deep in thought and the others let him think on what he'd just been told in
The silence was soon broken by something in Clint's back pocket vibrating harshly against his chair. He reached down and pulled out his own communication mirror. Across the screen the words 'Bright Eyes' were flashing in time with the vibrations.

"Accept call." Hadrian's panicked laced face filled the mirror, framed by stone wall and the edge of dark green curtains.

"Uncle Clint! I tried calling Mom on her mirror but it wouldn't go through! Is she okay?" Hadrian's voice was high pitched with worry.

"She's fine, Hadrian, she's sitting right here."

"Oh," Hadrian said, sounding relieved. "Then why didn't she answer my calls?"

Clint sent a small smirk at his partner who rolled her eyes. "Well, Bright Eyes, your dear mother may or may not have broken her handy dandy mirror when she got her message."

"Really?" Even if Clint couldn't see his nephew's Adam's apple forcibly bob, he could hear through the mirror they could hear Hadrian's nervous gulp. "Not sure what I expected, but I guess I shouldn't be so surprised, huh? Momma?"

Clint tilted the mirror to let mother and son see one another. "Yes, Hadrian?" Natasha's eyebrow ticks upward.

Hadrian ran a head through his messy hair sheepishly. "Sorry about the way I told you. I didn't want you to yell at me in French. You make the language so sound mean."

"Forgiven," Natasha said with a small smile. "Why did you call back? Did you forget to inform me of yet another dangerous creature roaming the halls?"

"Oh, no, nothing like that." Hadrian sounded relieved to not be in trouble. "Just that Wayne got a letter from his parents giving him permission to spend New Years with us. They wanna talk to you about everything, like what we're going to do and where and stuff. I sent their information to Auntie Pepper's mirror so she can take care of that."

"I left it in my room, but I'll check it out later," Pepper spoke up.

Natasha stared at her son for several long moments before saying, "Is there anything else, Hadrian?"

"Can't get nothing past you, huh, Mom?" Hadrian huffed out a little laugh. He didn't say anything for a bit, apparently gathering his nerves. "Am I coming home, Momma?"

Natasha hid a wince at how small her son sounded. She sighed. "I've decided to let you stay there for just a bit longer until we can be sure that after you're gone, your friends and the other students won't be left without protection in an obviously dangerous place. We need for you to make sure that Defence Club is up and fully running within the next few weeks. Can you do that?"

Clint leaned awkwardly out of his chair to push his face next to Natasha's. "Think of it as your first mission. Whipping those purebloods into shape and converting them to the wonders of MTV and cotton candy."

"Do I get a SHIELD uniform?" Hadrian asked cheekily. In unison, Clint and Hadrian turned their puppy dog eyes on Natasha, Clint sticking his lower lip out for extra measure.
The assassin rolled her eyes in fond exasperation. "No uniform. But we'll send an official SHIELD pin that you can hide under your robes."

"Yes! Agent Houdini is the building! And in need of a better code name!" Hadrian exclaimed excitedly, thrusting his fist into the air in triumph.

"Agent Bright Eyes," Clint suggested. "And your theme song could be Mr. Brightside with the lyrics changed."

Hadrian narrowed his eyes at his uncle. "You've already thought about this haven't you?"

Clint smiled innocently.

Natasha pushed his head away, and thanks to the strange position he had placed himself in, he fell to the ground with his legs caught on the arm of his chair.
Severus sneered down at the pathetic potion the youngest Weasley had turned in. What should have been a thick sea green liquid that was resistant to spilling instead was a runny mess of clear purple with inexplicable flecks of wooden splinters. It was easily the worst potion from the first year Gryffindor-Slytherin class, including Crabbe and Goyle's, two Slytherins even he could admit were placed in his house out of lack of options than anything else.

Only Granger, Greengrass, Malfyoy, and Romanoff had managed to make perfect batches, something he had come to expect from those particular students.

Romanoff...

That boy still caused more questions than he gave answers. The mystery and hype around Romanoff's mother breaking into the castle had finally fallen away to a few questions then and now and reminders whenever someone overheard the boy talking about his family. Of course, Dumbledore had yet to stop in his quest to find out what happened, despite his assurances that he knew well enough and to let it be. Severus had been there when Natalie Romanoff had torn the old man's barely veiled attempts at gathering information in the same condescending tone he disguised as a grandfather humbly asking for help up the stairs.

Then there was the Defence Club he and his friends had founded after having had enough of gaining nothing from Quirrell's stuttered lectures. A club in which students of all years and houses were willing to come together to participate. The grades of each member had gone up, though it was difficult to tell how well they were doing seeing as Quirrell wasn't in the habit of giving practicals. Even his godson, the very person who had attempted to knock Romanoff down to the bottom of the Slytherin hierarchy through a confrontation based on blood purity, had been to several of the club meetings. The blond heir had yet to try to use what he learned on other students, something Severus could admit had been a fear of not only his, but the other professors as well. Looking into it Severus had learned that Helena Hoster of his house had proposed that all active members of the... Knights of Loki... defence club had to sign a non-disclosure agreement that kept them using what they learned unlawfully in accordance to the school rules and Ministry set laws. Any who broke the contract would have their names etched onto a specially charmed board in the defence room and the student's respective head of house's office. Minerva had only huffed when he had awarded ten points to Slytherin for Hoster's thoughtfulness and another ten for application of less than common legal practice.

None of that stopped a few loud mouthed Gryffindors from shouting out for all the world to hear that the Slytherins shouldn't be allowed in the club since they'll just use what they learn on innocent people. Cormac MacLaggen - a second year Gryffindor with a particular breed of arrogance and lack of common sense - had even attempted to provoke a second year Slytherin by throwing a leg locking jinx while the boy was at the top of a set of stairs.

Severus would've paid anything to see Minerva strip the stupid reckless boy's hide and hang it on her wall.
There had even been talk of starting more clubs for other subjects, even those not part of the official Hogwarts curriculum. He would be damned, though, before he allowed a Spa Club to be founded in his school by Brown and Patil.

Severus sighed.

No matter how many times he questioned the boy about finding Hagrid's slobbering beast of a pet, he never received the answer he was looking for. Accounting for the chance he was wrong about what had shaken the friends up so much Severus had been deliberately vague in his interrogation but gave enough clues and hints for Romanoff to catch on had he known what he was talking about. Which the potions professor was sure he did. The boy was good, he would give him that much, but he still played up his curiosity a bit too much for a Slytherin. Had the boy been a Gryffindor or Ravenclaw, Severus may have fallen for the act.

No, he was certain Romanoff knew what he was being questioned about, but for some reason was keeping it to himself.

He knew he would have had more success in interrogating the boy's cohorts, but he didn't want it to get back to their respective houses, and by extension, the headmaster. Severus didn't want to find out what Dumbledore would do if he learned that a group of first years had stumbled upon his poorly thought out trap for the Dark Lord.

The more he thought about the strange muggleborn in his charge, the more Severus felt as if there was more to the boy than apart from the obvious. It was a niggling feeling at the back of his mind, something akin to when Legilimency was attempted on him. There was something familiar about the Romanoff boy, something that was comforting yet at the same time infuriating. Severus hadn't bothered to refrain himself from looking through the boy's records for a hint of what was vexing him. He knew if he could just find one of the missing pieces everything else would fall into place.

Perhaps it wasn't the best course of action to focus so much attention and thought on the Mystery of Hadrian Romanoff, but it was better than the alternative of dealing with ignorant children any more than he had to or being brought into yet another of Dumbledore's schemes.

His thoughts briefly drifted to that blasted stone hidden beneath that damnable beast. Yes, figuring out Romanoff was clearly the best choice.

"Did you hear? Someone from the Ministry is investigating the break in at Hogwarts." Velma MacNarrow said as her friend and neighbor, Constance Mowbray, bustled into the shop they both worked in during the school year.

"Really? I thought that was something my kids made up or misunderstood. A muggle really got into the school?" Constance sounded incredulous, not that Velma could blame her. A muggle getting into, let alone breaking into, the most protected place they knew seemed too far fetched even for the wizarding world.

Velma nodded, pushing aside the box full of jars of face cream that she had been shelving. "They're saying she might be a squib, but the question is still of how she got in the first place. I heard that she had a wizard with her that got around the wards somehow, but Merlin knows how he would do that."

"Oh dear," Constance fretted. Maybe I should write my Calliope and Ophelia about this."
Lisa nearly collapsed where she stood when she heard the words that signaled the end of the mock duel. She panted for breath, her hand clutching her robes over her chest.

"Can someone get one of the meddies? I think I went too hard on her," Hadrian's voice floated over to her, sounding sheepish, but not apologetic. She would've growled at him if she had been able to.

Lisa felt someone place a hand on her shoulder, another tilting her head up so she could see the dark eyes of Fern Dalton.

"Spirare," the Slytherin girl intoned, giving a precise flick and dip of her wand in Lisa's direction. Almost immediately Lisa could breathe easily again. "Don't do anything too strenuous for a bit, like chase down a certain show off. But other than that you'll be fine." The older girl said with a gentle smile and a knowing wink.

Lisa rolled her eyes but nodded her agreement anyway. "I've decided the best course of action is to compile a list of things he does so I can give to his mother during the holidays." A wicked smile broke across the first year's face.

Fern gave her an approving look before walking away.

"Eh, sorry about that, Lisa," Hadrian said as he approached, not insincerely. That eased a bit of Lisa's annoyance at being bested by him, again. "You did so much better than last time, especially with that tugging hex of yours, that I guess I got caught up in the moment. But-!" He said hastily when Lisa raised her eyebrow threateningly, unknowingly bringing up memories not of his mother, like some might assume, but of a certain agent. "I did think of something when I saw how you dodged that stunner I hid behind a leg locker."

Lisa tilted her head in confusion. Hadrian had a habit of sending multiple spells at once to make it harder to dodge or shield against them effectively. He had the advantage of stamina and more practical knowledge under his belt, as well as being one of the most powerful lower years. It had taken her three duels to even begin to come up with a defense against his barrage of attacks. "What exactly did I do?"

Hadrian's face lit up. "You spun in place and raised your wand up to follow the light of the spell to disguise the spell you were using. You did a complete turn and caught me off guard when you shot off your own stunner. If I hadn't grown up with my Uncle Clint you would've had me."

"That's the one who likes to hide in the vents and throw things at people, right?"

"Yup, that's the one." Hadrian affirmed happily. "Anyway, it reminded me of someone I know of. I don't know her exactly, but I've seen footage of her fighting and she does the sort of the same thing. I think it would be a good idea for you to build your dueling style on that kind of movement and strategy."

Lisa put a hand on her hip and definitely did not partially stick out her lower lip in what the boys had taken to calling the 'Wonder Pout' as she thought about it. Now that it had been pointed out to her, she could remember doing as he said. She hadn't even thought much of it, just saw the chance and took it. Hadrian had sent off another spell while she had been turning so she hadn't noticed that her own stunner had almost hit the target. She didn't think Hadrian would lie about almost being defeated just to make her feel better, in fact he was quite blunt and critical when directly asked for feedback, so she guessed that her nearly instinctive move was a good idea.
"Hmm, I remember doing that now, but I hadn't really thought much of it at the time because of that... jelly legger?" she hesitantly identified. Hadrian nodded. "-that you sent right back at me. You really think it's something that could work for me?"

"Oh, definitely!" Hadrian nodded his head excitedly, his hands gesturing wildly in his enthusiasm. "I've noticed that you're pretty flexible, especially considering that you said you've taken dance classes since you were little, and the woman I was talking about was really bendy, too. I don't remember much about her fighting, just enough to recognize something similar, but I think we can figure it out easily enough. You already used it without being taught or told so it should mostly just be having you use it consciously.

"I could start you on yoga and beginners gymnastics to help your flexibility as well as your stamina. It would help you dodge better when you're caught in an awkward position without coming back to bite you later when your spine pinches or your neck cramps up. You've seen me do back flips and somersaults during my warm ups?" Hadrian was so focused on what he was saying that he didn't noticed that the other students attending that day's meeting had stopped what they were doing to listen to him. Lisa felt her cheeks heat up at the attention, seeing as they were talking about her for the most part. She nodded anyway. "My Mom and some of my aunties and uncles have taught me to use those moves to not only get out of the way, but to catch whatever's coming at you if it's possible. Obviously you can't do that with a spell, but it's pretty much the same in practice."

Lisa decided to keep her questions about just why so many members of her friend's family were so involved in fighting - once again - knowing that it was pointless to ask him outright. When asked Hadrian would just talk around the asker in such a way that they didn't realize he wasn't actually answering until later on or he would just ignore the question outright. Neville had managed to bring her and Terry to heel by pointing out they could just ask his family themselves during the holidays. Wayne didn't seem to care much.

"Could we start that yoga and gymnastics... next week?" Lisa asked instead.

Hadrian shrugged. "Sure. I don't do much yoga, but Uncle Bruce does and I can ask him for tips."

It was just then that Hadrian noticed the audience they had acquired. Lisa wasn't surprised to see Hadrian give a weak chuckle and run his hand through his hair sheepishly. He sent an accusing glare her way, but she just shrugged at him, unrepentant. Maybe Terry was on to something when he said spending so much time with a Slytherin was corrupting her.

"Oi, Romanoff, can anyone join your little lessons?" Seamus called out from where he was standing between Dean and Lee, a position that made him look even paler in comparison.

"I don't see why not. It's not like you're going to be training for the Olympics. " Hadrian shrugged. Lisa noted with amusement that a Hufflepuff was writing 'Olympics' out on the unofficial official 'What In Merlin's Name Is That?' board that had gone up once they had noticed how the muggle raised tended to talk about things the magically raised had never heard of before without stopping to explain. Another one had gone up next to it and was the unofficial official 'What In Loki's Name Is That?' for the things the muggle raised had no idea about. Lisa was proud to admit she, Terry, or Neville were usually the first approached when someone wanted to know about muggle things from someone who understood their confusion. "Once you get the idea of it, you could do most of it on your own, or at least without me there to watch."

Hadrian paused as he thought something over. "Once most of you build up your stamina, reflexes, and flexibility, we can start on physically disarming an opponent. " No one made mention of the fact that Hadrian had become the unofficial official captain, Lisa mused. She thought it was mostly because despite some of the older students having some experience with dueling, Hadrian seemed as
if he had been... trained... and always sounded like he knew what he was talking about, but was still willing to step back when something came up that he had no idea about.

"Why do we need to know that if we can just learned Expelliarmus?" Cho Chang, a second year Ravenclaw, asked.

"So that you can even the playing field if your opponent uses it successfully first?" Angelina Johnson, a third year Gryffindor, answered for Hadrian. "Like, say Fred used the spell to disarm me, I could use what we learn here to get close enough to him to physically take his wand from him so we would both be even. Then I could just punch him in his face." She sent a smirk in the red head's direction, getting a suggestive wink in return.

Terry strolled up and threw an arm around Hadrian's shoulder. The taller boy's hand reached up to wipe a nonexistent tear from his eye. "They grow up so fast."

"Shove off, Boot," Marcus Flint called out, for the most part teasingly.

Terry didn't even bother to look at the older boy while holding up his middle finger, something he had taken to doing when he realized that most of the staff didn't recognize it for what it was. Lisa had surprised them by doing the same, only when they weren't in the presence of any staff though. Neville refrained from doing so as well and Wayne didn't see any need to use a rude gesture when he just ignored nearly everyone.

"Alright, alright," One of the Slytherin prefects said as he ushered everyone back to where they had been before Hadrian had gone into his spiel. "We have another twenty minutes before dinner so finish off whatever you were doing. Unless you want to be the one to explain to Professor Snape and Madam Pomfrey while the lot of you threw up because your stomach couldn't handle the food."

No one wasted any time in going through the cool down steps they had learned. Having to deal with Snape was bad enough, they didn't a worried and flustered Pomfrey added on top of that.

"Oi, Tom, whatcha readin' that trash for?" One of the Leaky Cauldron's regulars, Angus Filch, asked loudly from his seat at the counter. The ornery man was nursing a warm butterbeer as Tom had already had to cut the man off.

The owner of the pub set the newsletter he was reading down, showing the headline of 'Castle Under Siege of Nigglebats.' "Cos the Quibbler's the 'nly paper I know talkin' 'bout wha' happen'd at Hogwarts."

Angus hiccuped before asking, "What happen' at Hogwarts? I ain't heard a thin'."

Tom himself had only heard about it thanks to a few gossiping matriarchs that liked to venture out into the muggle world to satisfy their 'adventurous' side. He had long since learned how to tune out the usually mindless drivel, but hearing 'break-in' and 'Hogwarts' in the same sentence was enough to catch his attention.

"You don' know? Someone broke in."

"Neville, what is that on your sweater?"

Neville looked up from his Potions essay to see Hermione standing a few from him, her brow furrowed together and her lips pursed. Without thinking, he glanced down at his chest to see what she was talking about. On the left side of his chest sat the official, one of the few fully official things
about the club, Knight of Loki Defence Club pin. It was a simple circle lined in the respective main colors of the houses and the Norse rune for chaos etched in black against a white backdrop with a wand and a sword crossed below it. In the beginning it had occasionally flashed 'Knight of Loki' but the charm had worn off after a week or two. It had been designed by Dean, who showed a surprising talent at art, and brought to life by mass production through the Weasley twins. No one was quite sure how they managed to make enough for every Knight, as well as extra for any new members in just two days, but they all agreed it was best to let it remain a mystery. Not that that stopped everyone from having Flitwick check them over before wearing them. It was Fred and George, after all.

"It's the pin for the Defence Club." He answered simply.

If possible Hermione's lips pursed even more. Neville was reminded strongly of McGonagall. "Yes, well, I thought as much, but seeing as you don't talk about that club very much I wanted to make sure."

"Oh, okay. Why?" Neville asked, sounding genuinely curious. He didn't understand why Hermione would pull away from her studying to ask a question about his pin.

"Just... curious," she said before pausing, looking as if she wanted to say something else. Neville waited patiently for her to either gather her thoughts or force herself to say whatever it was. "So what do you do in the club?"

"Learn defence?" Neville answered hesitantly. He didn't get why Hermione would ask that, he figured the name sort of spoke for itself.

"Yes, obviously," she huffed. "What I meant was what do you learn, how do you learn it, who teaches what, what's not allowed, do you have to ask one of the professors for permission before trying something new?"

Neville shook his head to clear it off the buzzing the rapid fire questions had caused.

"Um, well, the Ravenclaws asked Flitwick for a list of year appropriate spells and stuff and then made a lesson plan using that and the books everyone had to buy. The older students learn a new spell first and then teach it to whoever needs to know it." Neville took a moment to think over the questions. "Uh, it's sort of a free for all. I mean, not everyone can make every meeting so they usually just ask someone who had been at the last one if we learn something new. I think the spells are separated between jinxes, hexes, curses, and then counter spells, but I can't sure."

When he saw the vaguely displeased look on Hermione's face, he hurried to continue, "Um, if you wanna know more, Leanne Turpin from Ravenclaw is one of the unofficial organizers. I'm sure she wouldn't mind telling you more about it."

"Hmph. How are you even sure you're learning the right things anyway? What if you're spending all of your time on material you don't need to know." Hermione continued her questioning after a brief moment of silence.

Neville bit back the reflexive teasing comment of 'hypocrite' considering her infamous study habits. "Well, the ones in the upper years all say that the exams don't really change each year. Some professors might add specific questions or something based on what they taught, but they're generally the same." He said instead, shrugging.

"Maybe you could come by one day and check it for yourself," Neville suggested happily. He didn't think he was the best person to explain the exact workings of the club, but he figured that Hermione would learn everything she wanted to by actually attending.
Hermione seemed to be arguing with herself. "When's the next meeting?" She asked finally.

"Tuesday after the last class of the day. I think we're gonna learn how to do a shield that'll block most basic defence spells."

Hermione agreed to show up, albeit a bit slowly as if she wasn't entirely sure she wanted to. Neville didn't say anything about her hesitancy, though. She could just be nervous about the club.

"My youngest, Morag, actually met the two who got into the school without permission from Dumbledore. Said they were nice as can be and didn't care one lick about blood." Glenna MacDougal said in a conspiratorial tone even though it was only her and her curious employer in the room.

Hester Denson nodded solemnly. She had heard several rumors about the scandalous goings on of the famed school, but had yet to learn much of it as her own children had graduated years ago. "Makes sense if the woman really is a muggle. Didn't you say they came because her son got hurt and no one knew how to fix it? That must've been horrible."

"Mhm. Merlin knows what I would do if I had to find out that my little Morag was laid up in the infirmary and that Pomfrey couldn't heal her right up. Storm the castle sounds like a good idea to me." Glenna said firmly. She'd raise all sorts of hell if anyone, headmaster or no, tried to keep her from her little girl.

Hester patted her seamstress' shoulder in solidarity. "Did your daughter find out how they got in?"

"No. But I did hear that a Ward Master was going to check out the school." Glenna was exactly sure who she had heard it from, but it seemed reasonable. After all if a muggle could get, Merlin knew what other sorts of people could.

"I don't remember having anyone check the wards when I went there." Hester said thoughtfully. Thinking back, she couldn't remember anyone mentioning much about the wards except to reassure others about the safety of the castle. Perhaps they weren't as strong as they were thought to be.

"Then it sounds like it's about time, then."

"Tony, I need you to- wait, what am I doing? JARVIS, can you make sure that no potentially dangerous experiments are attempted near and during the kids' visit?" Pepper asked as she strolled into the lab, walking around the machinery and junk strewn haphazard with practiced ease.

"Of course, Miss Potts." JARVIS agreed politely.

Tony looked up indignantly. "Don't you trust me?"

Pepper only arched an eyebrow pointedly.

"I'm wounded, Pepper," Tony clutched at his arc reactor dramatically. "Truly wounded. You wound me. Truly."

The woman rolled her eyes and held out a folder for Tony to take, the look on her face daring him to try not to take it from her hand. Tony huffed but complied.

"Huh." Tony said when he realized what the contents of the folder were. "The company that makes the mirror phones wants to collaborate with the magical side of SI to design the next update. How
"Sirius and Remus have taken to visiting magical communities all over America and Canada, and have been seen using their mirrors to contact one of us." Pepper explained.

Tony looked surprised. He knew the wizards hadn't been around as much lately, even he wasn't that oblivious outside of his lab, but he hadn't realized they were traveling. "What are they doing?"

"Research. They're trying to find anything that'll help them understand Natasha and Hadrian's bond."

"Well," Tony started, the tone he used when he was making a plan of action slipping through. "A two man group isn't going to cover much and that's taking into consideration that North America even has what they need to know." Pepper knew better by now than to take the pause in Tony's speech to ask questions. "Have the Magick Department whip up a research group, split them, and base them in the largest magical communities. China, Japan, Italy, Egypt, the like."

Pepper had taken out her phone and was steadily tapping out a memo for just that.

"Make sure that they're discreet, but not so much that someone who might be of help won't be able to find out. I want at least two magic users for every team in case of anything happening. Put Adams in charge of the project and keep everything off the books."

"Sir, if I may, I would propose collaborating with SHIELD's own magical department." JARVIS suggested.

Tony snapped his fingers. "Right. Pep, make another memo for me to hack into their files and find out what they're not telling us."

"I don't think that's what JARVIS meant, Tony," Pepper said, though she did type out to meet with the head of SHIELD's MD.

"I assure it wasn't," JARVIS deadpanned.

"Betrayal!" Tony accused, pointing his finger skyward.

JARVIS opened an audio file for Hamlet.

"Another one?"

Travis Mackley glanced up to see the newest hire looking at the order form."Yup. Ever since news of that muggle woman entering Hogwarts, we've been getting orders from everyone on books about warding."

"Well, it's nice to see people actually wanting to figure things out for themselves. I know my grandfather used to mutter and groan about the headmaster not keeping with tradition and adding to the wards. Said that as impressive and powerful the original ones were, new spells and such were created that the Founders wouldn't've known to prevent." John Berkely said, setting the order down. It used to be a point of tension in his family every time his grandfather, who he had been named after, brought up his thoughts on what the headmaster was doing wrong. It had amused both Johns to no end.

"When you put it like that, it makes a whole lot more sense than those who say to leave the founders' wards alone." Travis commented thoughtfully. It was pretty common knowledge that most magic had to be renewed to keep it from fading completely and who's to say that even the magic cast by the
founders' themselves would last so long without weakening.

"Grandfather used to say that there should at least be an alert system to notify the staff whenever someone used Dark Magic." John rubbed his right shoulder absently. "Would've saved me heaps of trouble back when I was a student."

Travis glanced at the stand where they placed the newspapers and magazines. "Surprised the Prophet hasn't caught on yet. Skeeter would have a field day with something like this."

"And have the Ministry admit that something actually happened?" John snorted. Merlin, he was starting to sound like his grandfather.

"Guess you're right."

Another owl swooped in.

Dean and Seamus both whipped their wands out when they heard the door to their dorm slam open. They managed to stop themselves from firing off their favored spells, a stunner and tugger respectively.

"Well, it's nice to see the little firsties keeping up with their studies, eh, Gred?" George teased with a nudge at his brother.

Dean rolled his eyes. "What do you two want?"

"A bit suspicious are we?" Fred asked, a knowing smirk breaking across his face.

"No respect for their elders, what a shame," George shook his head solemnly.

Seamus, already annoyed at the twins' entrance, aimed his wand and intoned quietly, "Efortia," keeping the tip of his wand pointing steadily at the hem of Fred's shirt. The third year was yanked to the side by the harsh pulling of his shirt, nearly knocking into Neville's trunk that sat at the foot of his bed.

"You gonna get to point now?" The Irish boy asked impatiently.

The twins simply grinned, Fred not looking the least bit annoyed or chastised. "We came to tell you about the snowball fight that's happening in the courtyard."

Both first years shared an interested look. "Snowball fight? Who's all playing?" Dean asked.

George's grin morphed into a smirk. "Most of Gryffindor-

"-half of Hufflepuff-" Fred continued.

"-a dash of Ravenclaw-

"-and a pinch of Slytherin."

Dean rolled his eyes, something he found himself doing a lot in the older boys' presence. "So... everyone?"

"Pretty much," George agreed. "It's Gryffinpuff versus Slytherclaw."

"Gryffinpuff?" Seamus questioned. "Huffledor sounds a lot better."
Fred look almost offended as he said, "Gryffinpuff is currently winning-"
"-like there was any doubt-" His brother added helpfully.
"So, you two want in?"

Dean nearly tripped over his own feet when he caught sight of what laid in the courtyard. True to the twins' words, the four houses had split into two sides, Gryffindor and Hufflepuff on one side, stationed to the left, and Ravenclaw and Slytherin on the other side.

The Gryffindors and Hufflepuffs had built a high standing long and thick wall of snow with several circles carved out through out to give the ones crouching down behind it visibility. From Dean could see, his housemates had taken over throwing the snowballs while the Hufflepuffs were delegated to making sure the snowball supply didn't run out. Oliver Wood was standing at the middle of the wall, calling out orders and warnings in what had been dubbed his Quidditch voice.

On the other side, the Ravenclaws and Slytherins had built a three walled fort several feet high with square windows carved out to give them visibility. There were much less students on their side, though they made for it by using the levitation charm to catapult several snowballs towards their enemies at once.

Over the cacaphony of startled shouts and battle cries, Dean could hear someone yelling "For Gryffindor!" with each barrage of snowballs thrown at the Ravenclaws and Slytherins, with an indignant "for Hufflepuff!" following each time.

Lily Moon noticed the four Gryffindors standing off to the side and called out their position to her friends. "Get them! Hurry before they reach the wall!"

Fred and George grabbed Dean and Seamus by their arms and made to run to safety of the Gryffindor-Hufflepuff Great Wall when they were suddenly assaulted by nearly a dozen snowballs, most of which somehow managed to land down Seamus' coat and shirt.

"Cover us!" George shouted as they ran, their arms held up to protect their faces from being smacked by the biting cold arsenal.

"For Gryffindor!"

The assault on the four was interrupted when the Ravenclaws and Slytherins had to take cover from the dozens of snowballs coming their way, only a few willing enough to brave the frozen attack and continue their own. Dean managed to get hit on his backside just before George pulled him to safety behind the wall.

They were quickly set upon by a red faced and out a breath Neville and much more composed Wayne, though the Hufflepuff's nose was as Gryffindor red as Neville's tie.

"T-took you long enough," Neville said, his teeth chattering slightly, reminding Dean strongly of how the boy had first been at the beginning of the school year.

Seamus shrugged. "We didn't know what was going on."

"Yeah, how did all of this happen without us knowing until the twins came to get us?" Dean asked as he risked a glance out one of the windows. He narrowly avoided getting hit in the face.

"It was pr-pretty sudden," Neville answered with a shrug. "F-from what I heard, some second year
Gryffindors were having their own small snowball fight and one of them accidentally hit a Ravenclaw."

"It sort of snowballed from there." Wayne commented evenly, not paying any attention to the wide eyed looks he was receiving.

"Did you just talk without someone speaking directly to you?" Seamus asked slowly.

"And to a make pun, for that matter?" Dean added, focused on what was really important.

Wayne just gave a half-hearted shrug, not saying anything else.

"For Gryffindor!"

"For Hufflepuff, too!"

Dean looked over to where the shouts were coming from to see Ron crouched near Oliver, jumping up with each coordinated attack on the other side to yell out the battle cry. Susan Bones, a Hufflepuff in their year, was stationed near him, exaggerated exasperation on her face whenever she followed the red head's shout with her own.

Seamus was ducking his head out to the side of the wall to look at the other side. "Are the others over there?" He asked as he quickly through himself behind the wall when someone pointed him out.

"I saw Su, Morag, and Mandy help make the fort, and Lisa said she was going to spend the day with them." Neville answered as he gathered up snow in his hands, forming it into a tightly packed sphere. "Something about being around girls. And I doubt Terry and Hadrian would miss this for anything, but I haven't seen either of them."

"You weren't with them when this started?" Dean asked, surprised. He could understand Lisa wanting to spend time with girls her age, but he would've thought that the rest of them were hanging out together.

Neville shook his head. "Wayne and I were with Sprout in the greenhouse. She was showing me some of the plants that only grow in winter and Wayne was...you know." He finished in a quieter voice.

Dean nodded in understanding. None of them who had been there during Miss Natalie and Mister Skywalker's visit had questioned Wayne about what he learned, though he was sure that their eagle friends had scoured the library for any mention of Lytharis. Wayne barely spoke as it was, pushing him for information would practically guarantee that he'd never say a word to them again. Besides, he was much more focused on finishing the painting of the castle for his mum.

"Get off your arses and do something!" Zacharias Smith yelled at them angrily from where he was near the ever growing and dwindling stockpile of snowballs.

Dean rolled his eyes, something he found himself doing a lot that day, but moved to grab an armful, Seamus following behind him. The twins had long since run off to create chaos wherever they could.

"For Gryffindor!"

"For Hufflepuff!"

"Andy, honey, what's the matter?" Ted Tonks asked easily, not seeming the least bit off put by his
wife's angered glower.

His daughter, Nymphadora, snorted. "Yeah, Mum, you look like you've been taking glaring lessons from Snape."

"Don't be ridiculous, Dora, Snape couldn't hold a candle to my darling Andy." Ted admonished teasingly.

Nymphadora snorted again, but didn't deny it. There was a reason she got along so well with the harsh and blunt senior Aurors with a tendency to glare at a crack in the wall she was training under and it had everything to do with being raised by a woman who could glare a glacier into melting.

"Anyway, why are you so mad?" Nymphadora asked as she turned back to her mother, nearly falling to the ground when one of her feet caught on the other, putting her off balance shortly.

"This!" Andromeda shouted, waving the stack of parchment in her hand around wildly and not allowing either her husband or daughter to get a glance of what they were. Ted waited a few moments to be sure she wouldn't hex him for startling her out of her anger before reaching out and grabbing the parchment from her hands.

Ted skimmed through the parchments quickly, searching for key words that would give an answer to the question behind his wife's anger. His eyes widened as he found what he was looking for and couldn't blame Andromeda for reacting the way she did.

"Dora, I think you should go see your boss."

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"King me."

Hadrian pouted slightly as he looked at the stack of black checkers placed near Wayne's arm. He only had three left on the board while Wayne's checkers almost completely dominated. Grumbling, Hadrian flipped the red checker over to show the crown imprinted in the plastic.

Wayne didn't even have the decency to smirk.

"Wayne beating you again?" Terry asked as he sat down on the floor next to Hadrian, a thick book in his hands. The Ravenclaw glanced at the few checkers Hadrian had left and let out a snort. "Never mind. Go Wayne."

Hadrian sent Terry a wounded look. "Whose side are you on?"


"Hey, guys," Neville greeted as he walked up to them and sat down next to Wayne. "What're we doing on the floor?" Terry shrugged in answer.

"Wayne wanted to play checkers." Hadrian said before cursing as he lost another checker.

"And the floor?"

"Why not?"

Neville and Terry shared a look, but let the matter go. They had both gotten used to Hadrian doing seemingly strange things for Wayne, either to make him comfortable in his new situation or on behalf of Loki. It was never much of an inconvenience and it seemed to help the Hufflepuff's nerves.
Neville noticed the book in Terry's lap. "What's that?"

Terry glanced down at his book out of reflex. "Oh, it's the book I decided to use for my research project." He held it up, showing off the title of *Making of Magicke*. "It's basically a beginners guide to spellcrafting. Most of it's theory and notable spellcrafters, but it's pretty good place to start, especially since Hogwarts no longer offers it as a specialized elective."

"What made you decide on that subject?" Neville asked, shooting a quick amused look at Hadrian, who was down to one checker.

"I've always wanted to know how some spells were made and that charm on Hadrian's books made me curious." Terry said.

"Wait, you said that Hogwarts used to have Spellcrafting as an elective. Why don't they anymore?" Hadrian asked. He couldn't remember Sirius or Remus ever talking about past electives, but maybe it was before even their time, and the charter didn't make any mention of specific classes that might have been in place during the founders' time.

Terry nodded. "Yeah, the book talks about it. Apparently there used to be a whole bunch of classes, like at your old schools, but over time more and more were dropped from the curriculum for one reason or other." Terry paused as he opened the large book to the index, his finger sliding down to find what he was looking for. He flipped through the pages before pausing nearly three quarters in. "New laws considered them dark, they couldn't find a competent enough professor in time, sometimes interest in the class just dropped. It says here that the number of students used to be higher and was steadily growing until the numbers began to drop and there weren't enough left to pay for the other classes. Huh. I guess that's why there's so many unused classrooms. The founders probably expected for the number of classes and students to keep growing so they made sure there would be room."

Hadrian and Neville looked surprised and slightly confused. Wayne seemed impassive as always. Terry wondered about the change between the nervous boy who couldn't look anyone in the eye he had been when they first met to the silent watcher he had become. He didn't think his weekly letters from Loki would cause that much of a difference, but he had no idea what the two wrote about.

Hadrian shook off his surprise just in time to lose his final checker and the game. "I'll beat you one day," Hadrian promised, pointing his finger at Wayne's face. The grey eyed boy only stared back, though there was the barest hint of smirk on his lips. Hadrian counted that as a win. He turned to Terry. "What's Lisa's project going to be on?"

"The difference between patriarchal and matriarchal lines. She's going to ask Susan about some things since the Bones are one of the few old families who appoint the oldest living heir to the head of the line, instead of the oldest male or female. I think the McGonagalls are, too. Word of warning, Nev, she's probably going to corner you to talk about the Longbottoms."

"The Longbottoms are patriarchal, right?" Hadrian asked, shifting from sitting crossed legged to leaning back against the wall with his legs outstretched. Terry didn't think much before resting his forearm on Hadrian's shins instead of the hard, stone floor.

Neville nodded. "Even though my Gran's the current regent. She says it's mostly a product of being from such an old line where it was practically unheard of to have a woman as the head at its beginning and that Longbottoms tend to only have sons, like the Weasleys."

"Don't they have a daughter?" Terry asked. He was sure that he heard Fred and George talk about a little sister. He thought her name started with G or J.
"Yeah, she's the first daughter in generations, and some think it's mainly because Mrs. Weasley is a Prewitt." Seeing the looks he was getting, Neville continued, "Because I'm the Longbottom heir, Gran's been giving me the necessary lessons since I was five. I've had to learn about the history of my family as well the other old lines and prominent families that are still considered new, like the Browns and Corners."

"Do all children in magical families have to learn this or is it only the heirs?" Wayne asked lowly, not looking up from where he was actually playing against himself.

"All children of the main line are required to know all of this, since they'll be the ones most likely to use it. Some parents from branch lines might decide to give the lessons as well. It's actually more popular in blended families." Neville sounded much like he did when talking about Herbology.

"I guess the non-magically raised are more curious." Hadrian shrugged. "I'd want to know about the family I was marrying or born into." He figured he could ask Sirius and Remus about it during the first half of their holiday. His mom had gotten the Potter account at Gringotts set up for him and he would bet that there was something about his birth family's history in it. It'd be nice to learn more about his extended family.

Neville gave him a side eyed look. Hadrian resisted the urge to laugh at the knowing glance.

He knew Terry had noticed the exchange, but he also knew that Terry wouldn't ask about it. If there was one thing Hadrian could say about his little group of friends was that they seemed to have an innate respect for privacy and weren't known to ask too many questions after someone had said they didn't want to talk about it. Though Hadrian wasn't sure if it made keeping his secret easier or not.

"Hey, what time is it? I told Dean and Seamus I'd help them with their Herbology essays." Neville stated.

Terry cast a quick tempus. Neville took a look at the floating numbers before letting out an uncharacteristic curse and shot to his feet, already running off by the time his friends managed to say their goodbyes and see-you-laters.

Hadrian turned to Wayne. "Rematch."

Wayne actually smirked that time.

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Amelia Bones glanced up from the truly disturbing amount of paperwork on her desk when she heard the sharp rapping at her door. Extending her senses to the wards placed on her door she recognized the magical signature of one of her trainees.

"Come in, Auror Tonks," Amelia was thankful that there weren't any stands or such near the doorway as Nymphadora was quite graceless for someone who practically danced around her opponents during duels. It had become a game among the troops to set up obstacles for her to get around without making a ruckus, partly out of wanting to train her stealth to an appropriate level, but mostly out of boredom.

A purple haired covered head popped through the door first, matching violet eyes glancing around the room for anything that would give her trouble, before Nymphadora walked fully into the office. She held no file or folder of any sort and didn't seem to be there on a message run.

Amelia removed her monocle and laid it gently down her desk. The enchantments on the eye piece made looking directly at the young woman a bit distracting thanks to the constant use of magic her talent required. "Can I help you with something, Auror Tonks?"
"Oh, yeah, I think so." Nymphadora’s hair flashed a muted orange before returning to its purple hue. Amelia had long since learned what each color meant, had more than once thought it would be a good way for the trainee to signal any distress, and knew that that particular shade meant the girl was unsure about something.

"Take a seat, then," Amelia said with a sweeping gesture to the hard and uncomfortable chairs she had placed in front of her desk. It was a tactic to keep those who would otherwise try to stay past their welcome from wanting to do so, such as certain lickspittles in horrible pink cardigans.

Nymphadora managed to sit down with barely knocking into the chair first. Amelia waited in silence for the trainee to speak about what she came for, staring impassively at the young woman whose hair grew a few inches before shortening again. Nerves, Amelia decoded. At least she knew she could still make the newbies anxious without saying anything.

Nymphadora seemed to steel herself. "My mother has heard, if true, unsettling news about Hogwarts," she began. "Apparently, several of her friends with kids currently at the school wrote home about a troll attack on Halloween, but they all thought it was a prank of some sort. At least until one of them remembered her daughter writing about a... muggle woman and a wizard of unknown origins entering Hogwarts without the headmaster’s permission." Nymphadora’s nose scrunched up as she spoke, as if she couldn’t quite believe it herself. "Mom decided to ask around to see if there was any truth to either stories and learned that a whole slew of parents had been written the same thing, but hadn’t put much stock to it until they put it all together."

"Are you telling me," Amelia started slowly as her tumbling thoughts sharpened into a straight line. "That there’s a possibility that a troll was in Hogwarts and not only were the parents not officially informed by a member of the staff, the DMLE was also left in the dark?"

"Basically," Nymphadora chirped. "I don’t know if it any of it actually happening, I mean who heard of a muggle at Hogwarts? But I figured with so many students telling the same stories it had to mean something was going on."

Amelia leaned back in her chair, much more comfortable than the ones offered to guests, looking deceptively mild. "Do you have any idea about the identity of the muggle woman who supposedly entered the school, with or without the headmaster’s granted permission?"

Nymphadora shook her head, her violet locks flying. "I was friends with some of the Hufflepuffs in the year below me so I could ask them about the rumors. We still keep in touch so I should get the answer in a day or so, depending on how busy they are."

"Before you go, may I ask why you’ve elected to bring this directly to me?" Amelia asked.

The trainee made a show of shuddering. "My mother was very much... invested in finding the truth."

Amelia smiled. "Aren't we all?"

"Is that normal?"

"I think he just might vibrate out of his skin."

"Should we go see Madam Pomfrey before we leave?"

"..."

Hadrian ignored the comments his friends were making. Though he had to give credit to Terry;
Hadrian was so excited to finally be going home again that it took nearly all of his will and training to keep mostly still and not run up the walls, out the door, and onto the train.

The first years had been gathered in the ante-chamber much like the first day and had been subjected to a lecture on breaking the underage magic laws from McGonagall. She had said that accidental magic would still be excused, seeing as it was impossible to control and they were still young enough for it to happen, but anything other than that would require further investigation. The stern professor had explained that the first offense was usually pardoned other than a warning, the second required a fine, and the third would mean having to pay a fine and risk suspension.

After McGonagall had walked away, Hadrian had whispered to his friends that the British Ministry Trace wouldn't reach all the way to New York and the laws were different there. Lisa had nearly given it away with her excited squeal.

Dean shot him an amused look. "What's got your pants all twisted up?"

"Just really excited to go home. This is the longest I've gone without seeing my family and they've promised to make it up for lost time. And knowing Uncle Tony, that probably means a play by play of all the 'genius' things he's done in my absence," Hadrian rolled his eyes just at the thought. "Plus Christmas with the Romanoffs is always fun. Mom teaches me a new curse word every year as a present."

Dean, and the others listening in, could only shake his head at the pleased as punch smile on the Slytherins face.

"What, no vodka shots?" Seamus asked, mostly kidding.

"Mom says I have to wait until I'm at least fifteen. Still won't be able to touch the magical stuff until I'm of age." Hadrian managed to sound put out and grateful at the same time.

"Don't you have to be twenty one to drink in America?" Dean asked, amused.

Hadrian sulked exaggeratedly. "Yeah, the age's the same on both sides, magical community or not."

"So when are you guys meeting up at Hadrian's?" Seamus asked.

"On the twenty eighth, so everyone can get their Christmas celebrations done and still have some in case something comes up." Lisa promptly answered.

"Yeah, then the four of us," Terry jumped in, gesturing to himself, Lisa, Neville, and Wayne, "Are meeting up at Diagon Alley before Wayne's mum and dad drive us to the airplane place."

"Airport," Lisa chimed in happily.

Terry rolled his eyes. "When we get off the plane, Hadrian's Auntie Pepper said there's going to be a driver waiting to take us to Hadrian's place."

"It'll probably be my Uncle Happy." Hadrian commented. "No, that's not his real name, and yes, you will be calling him that." He added at the looks he received. Really, of all the people he's mentioned and Happy's the one that sticks out?

"The name sounds a little suspect, just saying," Dean cuffed the back of Seamus' head. "What, like you weren't thinking it?"

Hadrian rolled his eyes and changed the subject. "Anyway... what're you two doing for the
holidays?"

Dean broke out in a wide grin. "Mum's taking me and my little sister to a Christmas village that she found out has a magical side to it. She thought it would be a fun way to see both sides."

"My mum, dad, and I are gonna go to my granna's house like always, but I'm finally old enough this year to help shoot off the firecrackers." Seamus' smile and the memory of his explosive talent in class had his friends worried for the safety of the Irish boy's family... and anything flammable nearby.

"So... I'll send your mum a fire extinguisher?" Hadrian's arm got smacked for the comment, but he decided it was worth it.

Lisa ran her fingers down the length of her braid, sometimes following the short curve of one section before moving to the next. "Well, Leanne and I managed to convince our parents to let us go to a birthday slash Yule party an old friend of ours is having. Other than that we're just gonna do what we do every year."

"Dad and I are gonna spend the morning together before I go to my mum's house." Terry added, not looking anyone in the eye as he spoke. No one commented on it, though Neville did place a comforting hand on the taller boy's arm.

When Neville spoke next, his voice was hushed and heavy. "Gran and I are going to visit my parents. I'm going to tell them about you all."

Hadrian had to look away then. He had lost his parents at a time that had him mourning them, but not truly missing them, and he had been lucky to have found a family that made the ache in him not hurt so much, but Neville had not only all but lost his parents as well, he constantly and consistently saw the effects of the horror they went through to protect him. It was humbling to see that despite what he went through, and for all his self-effacing, Neville had never been one to use his situation to make others pity him or lash out at others for the simple reason of having something he would likely never get back.

"It shouldn't have happened."

Hadrian had even realized he had spoken until he felt the heavy gaze of his friends on him. He looked up to see Neville's eyes boring into him, blazing and glassy.

"What?"

"It shouldn't have happened, Neville. You should be able to spend Christmas with your parents properly." Hadrian swore that he hadn't meant to add to sobering mood that had been slowly enveloping them, but the conversation had brought up something Hadrian always wished to forget.

Natasha was his mother. She had raised him, provided for him, protected him. She would die and killed for him and, no matter her opinion on the matter, he knew that he would do the same without hesitation and would only regret the hurt it would cause her. He loved her, wholly and dearly and proudly.

But she wasn't Lily. She wasn't James. None of them were. As much as the pain had been numbed thanks to his family, his parents were dead and the only memory he had for himself were muted nightmares of a terrible night.

There were days where he couldn't help but wonder what his life would have been like if Voldemort hadn't attacked them. All the what ifs of growing up and only ever knowing Lily and James as his parents, if he would have ever come across the Avengers or if both sides would've remained ignorant
of the other, if he would have cherished what he had or if would have taken it all for granted, if his parents would have survived that Halloween only to die in a later attack that would've left Harry Potter as nothing more than another orphan of war.

It hurt to think about such things and he never told anyone about it.

"It just shouldn't have happened." He stated, quite lamely, feeling ridiculous under the confused and concerned stares he was receiving on behalf of Lisa, Terry, Dean, Wayne, and Seamus.

Neville continued to look him straight in the eye, unwavering, something that once would have been a novelty on the shy boy.

"Yeah," Neville said at last. The word sounded heavy. "It really shouldn't have."
Staring down at the letter in his hand, Lucius Malfoy felt the great and sudden need to drink from his oldest bottle of firewhiskey. Draco had once again written home, though the letter was less of a correspondence between a son who had left home for the first time and his father, and more of a list of complaints and grievances.

After the fifth or sixth they had become quite repetitive and Lucius had taken to reading them while half distracted with his breakfast. The mudblood in Slytherin, the two mudbloods besting him in their shared classes, only three of his year mates following his lead, numerous arguments with the blood traitor, general complaints about Gryffindors being idiotic and loud.

The only true breaks from the norm was in the letter he received two days after Halloween, where his son seemed almost hesitant about something and instead of explaining had tried to call attention away from it by describing the Halloween feast in nauseating detail and the short missive he had been sent by Severus explaining Draco's membership of the newly founded defence club.

Reading his son's letters had become quite tedious, but he continued to do it so as not to cause unnecessary annoyance should either his wife or son find out about said neglect. The letters did also allow him to keep an eye on anything that Draco might write that would help Lucius' crusade within the Board of Governors. His son may not understand the significance of the matter, but Lucius was adept enough in reading between the lines.

Unfortunately, he had still not gleaned much from the weekly letters other than his son's almost unhealthy obsession in a mudblood's daily movements and activities.

Lucius, of course, had heard the rumors of a muggle entering the school, but had dismissed them with the sneer and disgusted scoff they deserved. It was bad enough all sorts of breeds were allowed to roam the halls, but to spread tale of a muggle doing so as well was against Merlin.

Then came the information that the filthy muggle had been none other than the mother of the mudblood who'd circumvented his son's place in the hierarchy. An associate of his had received word from his own son, a fifth year prefect, of an undisclosed attack on the mudblood that brought the muggle to Hogwarts alongside an unknown wizard capable of wandless and non-verbal magic.

The question of what just was going within the school was raised, as well as the question of why Draco hadn't seen it fit to inform him of the event.

Lucius knew that the mudblood boy was an American, that much he'd managed to detangle from his son's ranting of the child, and that his last name was Romanoff. Those two things alone would help him in tracking down any information on them at the Ministry.

If the rumors and stories proved to be true then it would stand to reason that there was something
more to the alleged mudblood and his family. And Lucius intended on finding out just what.

Hadrian would never admit it but when he stepped into the family penthouse in Stark Tower his eyes filled with tears.

It was one thing to be able to see his families through the mirror almost whenever he wanted, which was more than his schoolmates could do, it was another to be in his home where he could reach out to touch his family if he felt the need to. Even including his mother and Loki's impromptu visit, the months since had been the longest he had gone without seeing anyone from his family. The closest had been a botched mission that had his mother and Clint stuck in Barbados for five weeks, but even then he had the others always around him.

His mother's hand on his shoulder helped steady him and he tilted his head up to give her a grateful smile.

"Ri-Ri!" All the reflex training in the world couldn't have prepared Hadrian to dodge out of the way of Darcy's grasp. He was hefted up and pulled in tightly to her chest as she gushed about how much she missed him and asking about the presents he had surely brought her.

"Auntie... Darcy! Can't... breathe!" Hadrian managed to gasp out. The grip on him loosened enough for him to breathe properly, but not enough for him to make an escape without hurting himself or Darcy. He just knew she was doing it on purpose. "Missed you, too, Auntie Darcy," he said sincerely.

"Aw," Darcy gave him a quick squeeze. "What would I do without my little Ri-Ri?"

Hadrian rolled his eyes. "Please don't call me that when my friends get here."

Darcy just pressed a kiss to his forehead before letting him go.

Pepper stepped forward next, her arms outstretched and a smile on her face. Hadrian wasted no time in running into her arms.

"Auntie Pepper!"

"Oh, my little Hadrian," Pepper wasn't able to lift him up like Darcy, instead settling for bending at her knees slightly to wrap her arms around him. "It's just not the same with Clint and Tony being the only little kids in the tower."

"Hey, I resemble that remark," Clint grinned from where he was leaning against the couch, patiently waiting for his turn to hug his nephew or pelt him with confetti balloons. It could go either way.

Hadrian ignored his uncle and said, "That school really needs someone like you, Auntie Pepper. I think McGonagall's gonna snap one day if she has to keep doing all the work."

"If I had any say," Pepper trailed off with a devious glint in her eye.

Hadrian was passed from person to person, receiving tight hugs and heartfelt welcome-backs that made his chest feel warm. Clint did drop a confetti balloon on him but Hadrian retaliated with a tugger aimed at the archer's feet, glad that the restrictions on underage magic were different in America.

Bruce had given him a bear hug that he claimed was from the Other Guy and a promise to make a Halloween breakfast the next morning to make up for the missed one. Of course, this inspired Darcy
with the idea of dressing Hadrian up and taking pictures.

Thor had decided the best course of action was to throw Hadrian into the air - very nearly knocking the boy’s head against the ceiling - while extolling the virtues of the young warrior Hadrian. Loki had refrained from any physical contact, but he demanded an exact recount of the troll confrontation as well as any details he could remember of the Cerberus. (Natasha had backed the god on the idea and Hadrian knew he would probably be spending part of the day going over everything, especially once Agent Uncle showed up with the unnecessary paperwork.)

Sirius had jumped on top of Hadrian in his Padfoot form, giving his dogson a slobber filled welcome home. Remus had done nothing to help and had simply welcomed Hadrian back and asked about his studies. Hadrian hadn't thrown any jinxes at them, partly because he wasn't in the right position to aim correctly, but mostly because he didn't want to deal with the retaliation the two much more experienced wizards would gladly met out. He had grown up on stories of the Marauders after all.

Once he managed to wriggle out from underneath Padfoot, Tony had called out a 'think fast!' and tossed a small chrome device shaped like a pen. Hadrian hadn't been able to ask what it was before it shocked him - much like a joy buzzer - and he threw back at the genius.

"It's a prototype. It's supposed to detect magic and warn up in its presence," Tony had explained while eyeing the device. "Been running into some problems. It shocks, for example, instead of heating up and only in direct contact of someone or something magical. Once I get the kinks worked out, I'm going to work out a way to narrow down the specifications to detect harmful or dangerous magic, or unknown signatures."

"Like the wards I told you about," Remus had said in understanding.

"Exactly. Figured the non-magical side of the world could use something like this. Wards work best where there's ambient magic and a non-magical household won't have much if it's just one kid."

It was a testament to how used to Tony's new and sporadic ideas of innovations that Pepper already had the paperwork ready to push the invention through the magical department of SI.

Hadrian had only shaken his head - and after giving his mom a kiss on the cheek and then Darcy and Pepper ones as well after when they pointedly tapped their cheeks - took his things to his room to unpack. And look for any traps and pranks his uncles might have set up in his absence.

He ran out the room to chase down Sirius fourteen minutes later, four inch antlers poking out of his hair.

It was decided, after a very lengthy discussion about what exactly was happening in the halls of Hogwarts, that Hadrian should make a trip to a Gringotts bank branch to officially gain access to his vault. Sirius had suggested naming someone the Potter regent so that by the time Hadrian became of age all the Potter affairs would be in order and to ensure that no one in the British Ministry of Magic could attempt to gain access to the vault by using Harry Potter's disappearance to their advantage.

Sirius had been the first suggested, but he while he was cleared of all charges, the story of his innocence had not made it to the media and the public at large more than likely still thought him a traitor and Death Eater and they couldn't be certain that his name wouldn't make it back to Britain. Even if his innocence was finally reported, there would be questions regarding his missing godson and whether or not Sirius knew where he was. And while he had named Harry Potter as his heir shortly after he was born, he had yet to get around to officially changing to Hadrian after learning he had not actually been disowned other than in his mother's dreams and hopes. To do so now might catch the attention of the Malfoys who more than likely were of the mind that they had next right to
It was all precautionary and perhaps unnecessary, but at this point in time none of them were willing to risk Hadrian's identity being found out thanks to a gossip monger in the archive room at the Ministry.

Sirius explained that while Pepper or Coulson or even Tony would be good candidates as regents, non-magicals were unable to take up the mantle. He conceded that it wasn't so much another example of prejudice that had become tradition and more that a working magical core was necessary to be in control, even by proxy, of family magics. That left Remus, Loki or Thor. Thor had respectfully declined, not as knowledgeable in the workings of Midgardian magic and their monarchy as the other two. Remus' being appointed as regent would cause much the same initial reaction as Sirius due to the delay and his lesser known connection to the Potters, as well as his lycanthropy, unfortunately.

Loki was decided on, both out of a lack of options and because they trusted him with Hadrian's future wellbeing not to do anything to jeopardize it. He accepted the role with the understanding that if Hadrian's lineage was ever discovered, he would step down as regent and pass the mantle to either Sirius or Remus, who would have no reason to hide their standing connection to the Potter family anymore. Loki also had the backing of the Goblin Nation and could almost be guaranteed to not be screwed over.

Before they could appoint anyone, though, they had to go to the bank and prove that Hadrian was indeed Harry Potter. From there they could use Sirius' status as his magical guardian to give the title of regent to Loki, giving him co-magical guardianship of Hadrian.

They planned to visit the bank the next day, allowing Hadrian to rest from the train rain and subsequent International Portkey. It would be small party of Hadrian, Loki, Sirius, and Natasha that headed to Gringotts on Potter business.

The next morning when Hadrian asked if there was anything he wanted to have done, he barely had to think before saying,

"I want everyone to be brought under the protection of the Potters." He proclaimed sagely. Then turned to Sirius, a little sheepish. "We can do that, right? Like you did with Remus? Even though they're almost all non-magical?"

Sirius smiled proudly. "Yeah, pup, you can do it. We'll have to fudge a few details, basically make them squibs in the ministry's eyes, but you can do it."

"Cool," Hadrian nodded then downed the rest of his chocolate milk.

After they finished off Bruce's patented Halloween breakfast, with Hadrian stuffing the final pancake in his mouth just before they all stood up to leave, they headed down to the newly designated Apparently-Not-Teleportation Corner. It was one of the generally unused rooms of the penthouse with a sign written in crayon taped to the door. Tony denied being the one to write it but he was the one most put off by the wizards of the family popping up out of literally nowhere. At least he had the peace of mind that Natasha was just really sneaky.

Natasha made a face but allowed Loki to Skywalk her while Hadrian happily grabbed Sirius' arm to let the man Apparate with him going along for the ride.

"After we get this all sort out, can we shop around for a little bit?" Hadrian asked once they arrived. "I haven't had a chance to buy any presents for anybody and this year I'll have my own money."
"Of course, Hadrian. Even though Loki will be officially in charge of your finances, it'll be up to you not to waste away your trust fund." Natasha said seriously.

Hadrian nodded. "Got it. I already know what I want to get everyone so I won't take out more than I need."

Natasha ruffled her son's hair in approval, ignoring his indignant shriek at the action.

They easily made their way through the bustling holiday crazed crowd, mostly owing to Loki's intimidating presence and Natasha not being unwilling to use Sirius to part the way. Hadrian seemed to be reveling in seeing witches and wizards milling about while wearing jeans and ugly Christmas sweaters.

They passed by a book store with advertisements of the latest book in the Devils of Devon High series in the window. Hadrian pointed it out, saying,

"That's what I want to get Lisa."

Natasha glanced at the ad quickly as they kept walking, not wanting to be that group of people who stopped in the middle of a crowded walkway. "The whole series?"

"Yeah. I was gonna give her a fantasy series, but I figured that she might like to read something that doesn't have any mention of magic in it. I don't even think they have fictional stories over there except for children's books." Hadrian said.

"You'd be right, pup." Sirius confirmed. "There are few here and there, mostly from first generations, but for some reason there's a lack of fiction stories for anyone older than ten. Don't know why," the wizard shrugged.

"We'll stop by on the way back. Keep an eye out for where you can get the other gifts so we don't have to go back and forth," Natasha instructed, getting an understanding nod in return.

Soon they were entering the ever impressive and foreboding white marble building of the Gringotts American branch bank.

Hadrian easily slowed his pace as Sirius and Natasha moved to stand on both sides and just behind him as Loki confidently took his place in front of them, leading them like a king marching his soldiers into war.

The bloodthirsty grins some of the tellers were sending their way didn't help much.

Loki swaggered up to the first free teller. The goblin was more hunched over than the others, with a trimmed goatee at the end of his pointed chin and a gnarly scar twisted around his right eye, which was a milky white as opposed to the near black of the other. Not wanting to bend over or crane his neck to look at the goblin, Loki pointed his index finger at the teller and slowly raised it, the goblin following the direction into the air until he was eye to eye with the god.

"Bloodaxe," Loki greeted curtly.

The goblin snarled viciously at Loki, doing his best impression of an advancing shark. "Silvertongue," he said harshly.

A wave of his free hand and their words were distorted to the other customers and tellers. "We have business with the Potter account."
Bloodaxe sneered. "I suppose you have the last Potter in your custody?"

"Indeed," Loki shifted slightly and Hadrian stepped forward as confidently as he could manage. "Harry James Potter, who has gone through a rebirth and is now known as Hadrian Clinton James Romanoff. Perform all the tests you need to verify the truth, we have nothing to hide."

"A heritage test will be more than enough," Bloodaxe spat. His beady eyes flickered to Hadrian's forehead. "For some reason I expected a scar."

The corners of Hadrian's lips twitched even as he shrugged. "Your scar's cool, though." From the smile he got in return, Hadrian was seriously beginning to wonder if goblins had sharks in their ancestry.

"His heritage will of course be proven in a private room, away from prying eyes." Natasha said blandly.

"Of course," the goblin sneered. He gave a sharp flick of his forefinger. "Brickjaw will escort you."

A goblin with a metal plate attached to the curve of his chin approached them, his face blank. He made a slight gesture with his hand and stalked off towards one of the many darkened corridors. The others followed behind him without a word. Hadrian's eyes fell to the torches hung on the stone wall that lit up without a sound as they passed by, illuminating the otherwise dark hallway with an orange glow.

Brickjaw stopped in front of a steel door with no visible handle. He pressed the palm of his hand flat against the metal and it slowly swung open without a sound.

"You will have the room for one hour. Any longer and you'll have to pay an extension fee. A Gringotts specialist will be with you shortly," Brickjaw informed them curtly before turning on his heel and stalking off.

As soon as he was out of sight Loki rolled his eyes and gestured for Hadrian and Natasha to enter first. Then he made to walk in himself, only for Sirius to duck under him and dash into the room. The wizard sent back a cheeky grin and simply laughed while he dodged whatever spell Loki half-heartedly tossed at him.

The office was nearly barren, with a simple oak desk with a raised chair behind it, a room length shelf behind the desk with unidentifiable contents, two hard and uncomfortable chairs placed in front of the desk, and a small cart holding water and some sort of trail mix. The walls weren't white, but were still somehow white and reminded Hadrian of the infirmary at SHIELD, the floor a cold, discolored marble.

"Cozy," Hadrian remarked. He waited until his mom sat down primly in one of the offered chairs before climbing into her lap. She pinched his hip but didn't do anything else to make him move.

Loki claimed the other chair, leaving Sirius to shrug and shift into Padfoot, who then curled up near Natasha's feet.

To his credit, the goblin that entered the room just minutes after only paused for the briefest of moments at the sight before continuing his way to his own chair.

"My name is Kilrok and I will be conducting one Hadrian Clinton James Romanoff's heritage test." The goblin's voice was even deeper than the others they had spoken with and had a harsh, gravel like quality to it that reminded the others of a chain smoker's. "Which of you is he?"
Hadrian raised his hand slowly. The goblin only picked up the wicked looking quill on his desk and marked something down on a sheet of parchment.

"What exactly is required for a heritage test?" Natasha asked.

Kilrok spared her a glance. "It's a simple procedure requiring three drops of blood directly from the subject mixed with a specially brewed heritage potions. An enchanted quill is then dipped in the mixture and set to parchment, where it will then write the information needed." He explained.

"As the subject is a minor, a signature from his legal and magical guardian is required." Kilrok opened a drawer of his desk roughly and pulled out the necessary forms. Loki made a small beckoning gesture to bring the forms to his grasp, as well summoned a fine tipped pen, then handed them to Natasha.

She read over it quickly, learning that it was nothing more than a permission slip and acknowledgment of the test taking place. Hadrian leaned forward, allowing Natasha to use his back to write against as she signed where it indicated.

"Sirius," Natasha held the forms and pen down to the dog, who quickly and easily changed back into his regular form to sign on the dotted lines as well. Sirius stood up and handed the sheets of parchment back to the impassive goblin. He tossed the pen in Loki's direction who simply un-summoned it before it could hit him.

"Right then, let's proceed."

______________________________

*Charlus Hardwin Potter - Dorea Potter neé Black*

*James Charlus Potter - Lily Potter neé Evans*

*Harrison James Potter*

*Hadrian Clinton James Romanoff*

*Natalia Alianova Romanova*

*de familia inventus est regeneratio . factum est nomen eius usque ad animam*

Hadrian stared intently as the dark lettering on the parchment. It surprised him that his first thought after reading what the enchanted quill had wrote was whether or not naming the heir after their father was a family tradition or just a generational coincidence.

"What does the Latin at the bottom mean?" Hadrian asked to no one in particular. Everyone else in the room was more or less fluent in the language.

"It says that the rebirth gave you a new name and family, which is why my name is also there even though we don't share any blood." Natasha explained, her green eyes still attached to where her name was etched. The acknowledgment of her place as Hadrian's mother was comforting.

"Cool," Hadrian breathed. Natasha rolled her eyes at the response then turned to the passively watching Kilrok.

"The results of the heritage test will be made confidential, only allowing for the director of the bank, those we approve of, and those sitting here now to view them?" She didn't so much as ask as state what was going to happen.
Kilrok nodded sharply.

"Now that young Hadrian's birth right has been proven, we wish to assign a proper regent for the Potter account until Hadrian reaches his majority," Loki said evenly.

"It will be the simple matter of the heir proving to be of sound mind before declaring the chosen as their regent." Kilrok explained. "A magical declaration from the heir will be enough for now, though I advise you to complete the necessary paperwork so that others will have no standing should they try to contest the choice of regent."

Hadrian nodded before calling his wand from his hidden holster. "Uh... I, Hadrian Clinton James Romanoff, of sound mind and body do declare Loki Odinson, the Skywalker, the Silvertongue, God of Mischief and Lies, regent lord of the Potter family. By Midgard, by Asgard, by Yggdrasil, so mote it be." The tip of his wand lit a bright red before it pulsed out and faded. Hadrian stared at his wand. "Cool."

"Indeed." Loki drawled. He turned to Kilrok. "My first order of business as regent is a recall of any and all points of access to the Potter vaults, disregarding whether or not those in possession of them have the ability to enter them with or without Hadrian or myself's permission."

"All vault keys will be rendered null and void." Kilrok said.

"Are the American Gringotts connected to the main branch like the ones in Europe?" Sirius asked thoughtfully. Kilrok nodded. "Then we should make a quick trip down to the main vault and the trust vault I know Lily and James set up."

Kilrok nodded again. "Brickjaw will return shortly to escort you."

"This is just my trust vault?" Hadrian asked incredulously as he gazed in awe at the ceiling high piles of gold, silver, and bronze coins.

Sirius grinned widely at the look on his godson's face. "Yup. Lily and James wanted you to have enough for all your years at Hogwarts as well as a little spending money. Said it would help teach you how to maintain your finances or some such for when you took over as Lord Potter. And since you haven't been able to get into it for so long, it's built up quite a bit of interest."

"Did they leave him anything in this vault other than the money?" Natasha asked as she walked slowly between the mountains of coins.

"Eh, I think they left a trunk or two with things they wanted him to have in case..." Sirius trailed off, not needing to explain why. "They're probably near the back."

Sirius led his godson through the stacks of polished coins, giving him an estimate on how much he would need to buy the gifts he want to get and how much he should convert for the stores that took cash as well as galleons.

"I know you want to get Lisa that book series, what about the boys?"

"Well, I wanna get Terry one of those monthly subscription to one of those science magazines Uncle Tony has, already paid for a full year. Wayne said he doesn't want anything, but what does he know?" Sirius let out a bark of laughter at his godson's dismissiveness. "So I'm thinking of getting him a book on Norse mythology or maybe a personalized checkers set. You know, so he can kick my a-...butt in style."

"I heard that!" Natasha called out, making her son's 'Mom Paranoia' spike up even more.
Sirius openly grinned at Hadrian's wide eyed look. "What about Neville?"

"You know those Marbles of the Senses things? I wanna get him some for hearing and scent, the relaxing kind. Maybe it'll help his nerves."

"And what are you getting for your dear old goddad?" Sirius said in exaggerated nonchalance, making a show of looking around for any eavesdroppers.

Hadrian rolled his eyes. "Uncle Bruce and I are gonna get Uncle Remy that new history book about the druids."

"Bor-ing!" Sirius proclaimed. "And not who I was talking about."

"Are you sure? I guess you are my godfather and kinda old, but I don't know about you being 'dear.' I thought that was my dad," Hadrian's eyes glittered innocently.

The pun about James halted Sirius in his tracks while Hadrian continued on. The boy spotted two trunks sitting side by side against the back wall of the vault. They were both predominately black and trimmed in gold plating with large, clunky locks. He walked towards them and ran a small hand over the edge, fighting down the urge to feel overwhelmed. He hadn't even opened them, for Odin's sake.

"Found them!" Hadrian called out, his eyes never leaving the trunks. Sirius reached him first, followed by Natasha and then Loki.

"Do we just carry them out with us or do we have to sign anything?" Natasha asked, her eyes barely glancing at the trunks.

"Hadrian or Loki have to be the ones to take them out, or else the wards around the vault will activate," Sirius explained. "We can just shrink them now and let you look through them back home, if you want." He added when he noticed that Hadrian had still yet to pull his gaze away from the items.

Hadrian only nodded.

Sirius pulled out his wand, shrinking the trunks easily, leaving Hadrian to pick them up and place them gently in the pocket of his hoodie.

"Come, Hadrian, the sooner you finish shopping, the sooner you can see what they left for you," Natasha said softly, wrapping a slender arm around her son's shoulders.

"Yeah," Hadrian glanced down at where the trunks were hidden behind the dark fabric of his hoodie. "Yeah."

Hadrian sat in the middle of his room, the trunks from his trust vault open in front of him and their contents laid out carefully on the carpet.

Photo albums filled to the brim with regular and magical photos, several journals with his parents' initials stamped on the covers, faded envelopes, some with names that Hadrian recognized and others that he didn't. His mother's wand, slightly warped as it was, several vials of a clear, shining liquid that reminded Hadrian of a lava lamp, a thick handmade book with a rat, a dog, a stag, and a wolf stamped into the leather cover, and a large envelope with Hadrian's name scrawled on it.

With only slightly shaking hands, Hadrian picked up the photo album closest to him. The first page was simply titled 'To Harry.' Hadrian slowly flipped through the laminated pages, his eyes stinging
as he recognized that most of the pictures were of his mother when she was pregnant with him, going
about her daily business and glaring at whoever was taking the pictures. There were photos of her
baking in a modest kitchen, of her curled up on the couch with a book in her hands, napping
haphazardly on the couch with the same book on the floor, sitting next to a wizarding radio while
rubbing her swollen belly. Several pages in and his mother was no longer pregnant and instead the
pictures began to center around a small and fair skinned baby with a tuft of dark hair and large bright
green eyes.

"Man, I was adorable," Hadrian said softly to himself, his hand reaching down to trace the outline of
his pictured self as his mother made him giggle uncontrollably by summoning dozens of differently
shaped and colored bubbles from the tip of her wand. "I kinda wanna learn that spell."

He took his time going through the pictures, tracing the figures of his mother, father, and hisself. He
noted the superficial similarities between him and his father, particularly their hair and smile, but
noticed that he had gotten his chin, cheekbones, and coloring from his mother as well as her rather
infamous eyes. His smile was more reminiscent of his Uncle Tony's than anything, something he
would refrain from telling the man until the genius needed to be cheered up. Or emotionally
blackmailed into something.

Some of the pictures had others in the background. Hadrian recognized a few of them, like Sirius -
who sometimes appeared as Padfoot curled up against baby Harry- Remus, McGonagall, and pretty
blonde woman who could only have been Neville's mom but some of them weren't familiar at all. He
would ask Sirius and Remus about them later if he thought about it.

But for the most part he focused on the smiling faces of his mother and father. His father had deep set
laugh lines that reminded Hadrian strongly of his Uncle Sirius while his mother's smile reminded him
more of his Auntie Pepper, some times just a quirk of the lips, some times a full smile of pearly teeth
that lit up her whole face. They were smiling in almost every picture they were in, even if it was
quite obvious that they were stressed and sleep deprived. Sirius had always talked of how his parents
had done their best to keep the war out of their home and now he could see it. It gave him a feeling
as if something had settled in his chest at the sight.

The few pictures Remus had managed to hold on to over the years couldn't compare to what his
parents had left for him. Hadrian promised himself to make copies for both Remus and Sirius, who
had lost his own mementos when his apartment had been burned to the ground by his own cousin.

With a sigh, and a brief glance at his mother's wand, Hadrian reached his hand out for the first vial of
iridescent liquid.

"It's Christmas!"

No matter how many years he had gone through, Hadrian doubted he would ever learn how to get
out of the way of an equally enthusiastic Darcy, Tony, and Sirius. Not even his mother was capable
of completely giving them the slip; Bruce thought that Tony had implanted them all with Christmas
Morning Trackers ™ and no one could honestly say it was an outlandish theory.

"Padfoot, stop licking me!" Hadrian cried as he attempted to shove the large dog off of him. The
animagus ignored him and continued to run his tongue up the side of Hadrian's face, catching his hair
and making it stick out wetly from the rest of the feathery mess.

"Come on, Ri-Ri, we can't open presents until everyone's up. Don't be the one to make us wait!"
Darcy said loudly, bouncing excitedly on Hadrian's bed. Hadrian noted that she was wearing her
favorite footie pajamas, black with radioactive green and champagne pink zombie unicorns all over it
and a hood with a shiny horn sewn onto it.

Resigned at the sight, he asked, "Puppies or Merlin?"

Darcy grinned and pulled out a bundle from behind her and threw it at Hadrian. Hadrian sighed when he saw that instead of the puppy covered or stereotypical Merlin hat covered footies she had given him red ones with cartoon lions all over it and a hood with yarn attached to it as a fake lion's mane. No doubt Sirius was behind this... *atrocity*. He could only hope that no one in his house found the inevitable pictures.

"Alright, alright, I'm up," Hadrian groaned as he finally managed to push Padfoot off of him. "Now get out so I can change."

Darcy laughed but hopped off his bed and dragged Tony out by his ear. Padfoot darted forward to give Hadrian one last lick before bounding out of the room, nearly knocking the other two over.

Hadrian rolled his eyes then glared at the pajamas sitting innocently on his bed. If he wasn't so sure that Darcy had several backups, he would've set them on fire and sent the ashes to Jamaica.

By the time he made it to the living room everyone else was already waiting for him, each of them dressed in footie pajamas and only half of them looking ready to commit homicide. It was a definite improvement from their first Christmas with Darcy.

"Oh, Ri-Ri looks so adorable!" Darcy squealed, holding a camera up and nearly blinding Hadrian in the process. Rubbing his eyes, Hadrian stumbled over to the arm chair his mother was sitting in and wriggled in next to her.

"Presents or breakfast first?" Bruce asked. He was sitting between the visibly giddy Clint and Thor on the couch, doing his best to act like he wasn't wearing a green footie with turtle shell pattern on the back.

"Presents!" Darcy, Tony, Sirius, Thor, Clint and Hadrian exclaimed together, turning their collective puppy dog eyes on those closest to them. It was an effective technique as long as it was used sparingly, enough so that Fury had it outlawed it in every SHIELD sanctioned building.

Pepper rolled her eyes, sharing an exasperated look with Bruce, Remus and Natasha but agreed with a gesture of her hand.

"Whose turn is it to take on the role of your Christmas god?" Loki asked. Hadrian felt the need to glower darkly at him when he saw how regal Loki managed to look despite wearing footie pajamas with a hood that had attached cat ears and sewn on whiskers. Any pictures of the god would be no good for blackmail.

Thor jumped up from his spot in the gaudy grandma chair that Tony only allowed to be seen during the holidays. "It is mine, dear brother!" He declared, standing proudly in his golden retriever footie.

Loki rolled his eyes at the blond's enthusiasm.

Thor - who years before had been forced to take lessons on how to handle potentially fragile gifts courtesy of Pepper and Maria - quickly passed out the presents to their respective receivers, grinning wildly the whole time. At some point JARVIS started playing Christmas music and turned the tv on to show a dancing snowman.

Hadrian was surprised to see how many more presents he got this year, though considering how he made so many friends he shouldn't have been. A shiver of dread ran down his spine when he saw
that one of the presents was from Fred and George.

"JARVIS, are you recording?" Clint asked.

"Yes, Sir Legolas,"

"Okay, one, I'm kicking Tony's ass later," Clint pointed at the genius dangerously. "Two, free for all!"

Without further ado, he reached for the closest gift and proceeded to rip the wrapping paper off, not bothering to take time or care. Darcy, Sirius, Hadrian, Tony and Thor followed his example happily while the others shook their heads and opened their own presents at a more respectable pace.

Hadrian opened the present from his mom first, not at all surprised to see that it was a knife throwing kit. His mom had a habit of alternating between 'age appropriate' gifts and giving him an introduction on poisons that specifically targeted the liver. He carefully set the gift aside and reached for the next one.

Clint had gotten him a fake - or maybe a legitimate - SHIELD badge. He had apparently gotten Phil in on it because the lead agent gave him paperwork to fill out for his 'infiltration and information gathering' mission at Hogwarts. Hadrian was going to make the best paper airplanes ever.

Remus got him a new monogrammed wand holster while Sirius gave him a handwritten journal detailing the next step in the process of becoming an Animagus.

Bruce got him an advanced chemistry experiment set, Tony gave him three new updated Spider Bites as well as a rune powered fountain light that was marketed as being able to make the ceiling look like the sea and Maria had gotten him tickets to a hockey game along with a thinly veiled hint about taking someone who liked the sport.

Thor had given him a dream catcher with several small dream stones woven into it. Loki's gift was a large book filled with Mischief Magick, most commonly used by sprites and faeries. Natasha had tried to set the book on fire with her gaze alone when she saw it while Sirius actually got on his knees in reverence.

Hadrian shook his head and hid the book behind his back before reaching for the next one which turned out to be a subscription to a dueling newsletter from Lisa. Terry had sent him a beginner's guide to checkers - that Hadrian immediately tossed aside - along with a copy of the Tales of Beedle the Bard, something Remus said was the closest thing the British wizarding world had to fairytales. Wayne got him the complete series of A Series of Unfortunate Events with a note telling him not to find any inspiration from the books.

Neville's present had the most effect on him. It was a framed wizarding picture of two babies sitting together on the floor, giggling and clapping at the bubbles coming from a pretty blonde's wand. One child had a tuft of dark hair and bright green eyes and the other had soft golden curls and slightly too large ears. A large smile broke out on Hadrian's face as he traced his finger along the edge of the picture.

Natasha looked over at what had caused her son's reaction, a small grin on her face. "That's Neville, isn't it?"

Hadrian nodded. "And I'm pretty sure that's his mom. He looks a lot like her, even though his hair got darker."

"At least he's starting to grow into his ears," Natasha teased, getting a laugh out of Hadrian.
"There were some pictures of Neville's parents in the albums they left in the trunk. I'll show them to him when he comes over." Hadrian promised.

"Hell yeah! Exploding water arrows! Tony, I love you, man!"

"Neville!"

The shout of his name was Neville's only warning before he found himself with an arm full of Lisa Turpin. Neville was nearly thrown back into the fireplace he just stepped out of and was thankful his gran had trusted him enough to arrive by himself. He didn't want to think about what would've happened if Lisa and him had knocked the dowager over.

"Hello to you, too," Neville laughed, giving the girl a tight squeeze before releasing her. "You seem excited."

"Are you kidding? She got here an hour early and was going through on her notes about the muggle world when I got here," Terry said as he walked over to them.

Lisa huffed and crossed her arms. "Oh, hush. I know you're excited to see where Hadrian lives, too."

"Well, yeah," Terry admitted. "But that's more to do with wanting to see just what kind of place produces a guy like him and less about all the muggle stuff."

Lisa stuck her tongue out at him in lieu of a response.

Wayne rolled his eyes at his friends' actions but couldn't deny that he was just as excited for the trip as they were. Finally knowing his heritage had been like a balm to his soul, easing his constant nervousness and wariness. His parents had noticed the change and had wanted to meet the man who helped him. Wayne had been surprised when he heard they wanted to learn all they could about Lytharis, though he felt he really shouldn't have been and settled on being grateful. Finding out your adopted son was a wizard is one thing, discovering he could turn into a wolf was another.

"Wayne, are you ready?" Terry's question brought Wayne out of his thoughts and the Hufflepuff nodded. "Dad! We're all ready!" Terry called out.

Terry's father, Terrence Boot Senior, strolled into the front room where the friends had agreed to meet, an easy smile on his face. Terry seemed to take after his father who he shared the same hair and eye color as well as the slight unevenness of their jaws.

Terrence looked over at the four first years. "Did you already send all your things ahead?" He asked, having noticed that none of them had any luggage.

"Yes, sir," Lisa answered. "Hadrian said since we were changed the plans from going by plane that it would be better if we sent everything first so they could have our rooms set up when we got there."

"Did you manage to get why they changed plans?" Terry asked.

Lisa shook her head. "All I got was something about some a-hole with immunity. Have no idea what that means,"

Terrence grinned at his son's put out expression before pulling out something wrapped in a thick fabric. He unwrapped it showing that it was a framed picture of a young Hadrian wearing a tiara with pink gems and a bright yellow and pink tulle tutu. Terry tested Lisa's limits on what could cause her to break the Underage Magic laws just to get him to stop laughing.
"I wonder who picked that for the portkey," Neville wondered, clearly amused.

"I don't know but I'm sure Hadrian didn't have any say in it," Lisa grinned.

Terry finally managed to reign in his laughter. "Do you think I can keep this after it's used?"

Terrence simply ignored his son and made a note to himself to either return the picture or destroy it before Terry could get his hands on it.

"Everyone grab hold," he ordered as he held the picture out. Once they all had a firm grip on the frame, Terrence said clearly, "Odin's beard!

They all felt the familiar hook around their navel before they disappeared from the Boot household.

Happy didn't fall over himself in shock when five people appeared out of nowhere in the empty lobby room, a testament to how long he had been around Tony Stark and the rest of the Avengers.

He gave the strangers a few moments to orientate themselves before stepping forward, holding his hand out to the man he assumed was Terrence Boot.

"Mr. Boot?" The man nodded and shook Happy's hand. "Happy Hogan, your driver for the day. Ms. Potts thought it would be a good idea to give you all a short sight seeing tour before arriving at the tower." Happy explained.

"So we're not at Hadrian's yet?" The only girl asked curiously.

Happy shook his head. "No, ma'am. Ms. Potts had it arranged for you to arrive in a reserved lobby room of one of the many prestigious hotels New York has to offer. After the plans were changed from me picking you up from the airport, she decided for me to still be your driver to give you a small taste of what to expect during your stay, as well as your chosen guardian."

"Oh, cool," A tall boy who looked like Terrence said.

"Very cool. Ms. Potts also said that she had the car stocked with... wizarding treats and drinks as well as non-magical ones that little Hadrian said you probably haven't tried before." Happy said. "I was told that your belongings were already sent ahead so if you're ready, we can go now."

Excited grins broke out on their faces as they followed the driver out of the room, with Wayne being the only one noticing how his friends' strange attire didn't brook a second glance from the New Yorkers.

Hermione sighed as she set down her quill and absentely rubbed at her cramped hand. The extensive notes she had taken rather messily were taking forever to rewrite in an organized manner in the journal she had been given.

She hadn't meant for the side project for take up so much of her holiday, but she also had to finish all the normal assigned to her and it took her longer than usual to write her the essays to her normal length without the Hogwarts library at her fingertips and the free range to practice whatever spells she came across in her studies. Her mother had tried talking to her about taking a break but Hermione had brushed her off, telling her that this work was a lot more challenging for her than her old studies.

The sudden, distinct disconnect between her and her parents had startled Hermione when she had returned home. She used to be able to tell them all about her school work but now she found herself
having to explain everything they didn't understand and it wasn't as enjoyable as it usually was. They could no longer offer her any help as they were almost completely ignorant of everything to do with the wizarding world and she found it frustrating.

She had no friends who could understand her as the kids from her old academy always treated her harshly for being smarter than them and she had yet to connect with anyone at Hogwarts. Hermione had been so sure that she would finally be able to make friends with people her age once she found out about her magic, but so far it was exactly the same. The other Gryffindors disliked her study habits and Ronald Weasley, Parvati Patil, and Lavender Brown especially made their displeasure known whenever she was within earshot. It had barely been a week into term and she had already begun regretting arguing with the Sorting Hat to place her in the house of the brave instead of the house of intellect as it tried to do. She was sure that they would have been much more accepting of her.

Though perhaps not Terry Boot and Lisa Turpin, who were always around Hadrian Romanoff, the most frustrating boy she had ever had the pleasure of meeting. He was like a walking contradiction. He was a muggleborn in a staunchly pureblood biased house who knew more about the wizarding world than any other muggle raised student, including her. He had broken the rules at least two times that she had known of but got away with it both times, even though she had warned Professor McGonagall about the first time. And then he had done the unthinkable and practically led a rebellion against the poor Professor Quirrell with that defense club of his. She had heard of several students who had given up all pretense and started to skip all classes except on test days, the irksome Weasley twins among them. Hermione just couldn't understand how anyone could show such disrespect to a professor.

So when the understandably upset Professor Quirrell had told her to stay after class to ask her if she knew what his wayward students were up to, she didn't spare another thought when he hesitantly asked her to sit on some of the club meetings.

'Knights of Loki, how droll. Naming themselves after such a rude man.'

Hadrian didn't bother hiding his knowing grin at the awe struck look on his friends' faces. Nearly everyone had that sort of reaction when they entered the Avengers Tower for the first time, never mind someone who had been raised in a society that couldn't pronounce electricity on a good day. He couldn't wait to see their faces when they meet JARVIS. And Darcy. And Fury. And Thor. And Dummy. Basically everyone.

He was sure that his friends had been expecting for him to live in a house or an apartment, or perhaps even a manor like some of the more well to do magical families, not a sky-scraping tower in the middle of the city.

"You live here?" Neville asked reverently. He had never seen a place so sleek and elegant and full of light. The British wizarding world was buried in tradition and that extended to the architecture and decor. The large walls of crystal clear windows giving a fantastic view of the city were amazing; the living rooms and dens were so open, no walls separating each section and making it seemed closed off; the furniture and appliances were all modern and top of the line, most of them nothing like anything he had ever seen before.

"Nearly all my life," Hadrian answered proudly. He couldn't think of anyone who wouldn't be proud to live in a place personally designed by Tony Stark. Except maybe Reed Richards, but that was a can of worms he didn't want to open.

Wayne turned to face Hadrian fully. "I'm moving in." He deadpanned.
"Be sure to inform your parents," Pepper said as she strolled past, her eyes on her Stark tablet and a frightened looking intern following behind her, trying to keep up with her while holding onto the notepad and pen shaking in his hand.

Neville, Lisa, Terry and Wayne's eyes followed the two until they disappeared into the elevator, confusion on their faces. Hadrian just shrugged and said, "New guy, he'll catch up eventually."

Hadrian turned back to his friends, clapping his hands together and grinning widely. "So, who wants a tour?"

"Why are there so many boxes of these Poptart things?" Terry asked, staring into the pantry filled with nothing but blue boxes.

"Thor says they're the food of the gods. And I guess he would know." Hadrian shrugged. He had long since gotten used to the Apocalypse ready stockpile of the food.

"What?" Wayne raised an eyebrow at him.

"What."

"Hey, J, is anyone in the game room?" Hadrian called out suddenly, confusing his friends as they couldn't see who he was talking to.

"Not at the moment, Hadrian," JARVIS' crisp voice filled the room and nearly knocked the Brits off their feet in shock.

Hadrian bit down his laughter at their shock. Sure, he could've warned them ahead of time about the AI but where was the fun in that?

Lisa and Wayne leveled glares on him, apparently able to sense what he was thinking.

"That's my mom's room." Hadrian pointed at door as they walked past it without stopping. "Don't go in there without bulletproof and flameproof armor. In fact, just don't go in there."

His friends sent startled glances back at the innocent seeming door and hurried their steps.

They were all thrown to the floor when an explosion rocked the tower. Neville, Lisa, Terry and Wayne panicked and drew their wands, ready to put their training to good use. Hadrian, however, sighed heavily and ran a hand through his hair.

"Uncle Tony must be in his lab," he commented.

Lisa stared at him incredulously. "That was your uncle?"

"Tony Stark, the Great Weaponsmith, Man of Iron, one of Earth's Mightiest Heroes and the Mad Sorceror of Midgard," Hadrian declared seriously and dramatically, staring into the eyes of his friend in turn. Neville, Lisa and Terry stared back at him, dumbfounded, but something like suspicion crossed Wayne's face followed by realization and shock. Hadrian hid a smirk. "But we don't call him any of those. It's not healthy for a human to have an ego that big."

Another explosion rocked the tower.
"Might I suggest someone take the fire extinguisher from Dummy?"

"And this is the main training room," Hadrian announced as he led his friends into the large room.

And then ducked and rolled to the side when an arrow with a boxing glove attached to it came soaring towards him.

"Uncle Clint!" Hadrian growled as he shot to his feet, glaring at the unabashed archer who was hanging upside down by his knees from the rafters.

"Bright Eyes!" Clint called back, throwing his arms down to throw them up in teasing excitement. "Friends of Bright Eyes." He added as an afterthought.

Terry waved at the upside down man happily. "Hello, Creepy Man In The Ceiling,"

"How come I'm the one who gets called that and not JARVIS?" Clint complained.

"Perhaps because I don't make it a habit of mine to attack small children," JARVIS remarked.

Hadrian pointed a finger at Clint and let out a mocking 'ha!'

Clint pouted at his nephew, an expression that looked decidedly odd when one's face was upside down. The archer felt someone's eyes boring into him and turned slightly to see that Neville was staring at him, his brow furrowed in thought. The boy seemed to be assessing Clint, though for what, the man didn't know.

Neville found himself thinking that if this was the place Hadrian grew up in and these were the people he was raised by then it was no surprise he turned out the way he did. He had known that Hadrian had been given a chance at having a family, had met his mother and one of his many uncles, and had seen the result of being raised in such a home but actually seeing where Harry Potter had become Hadrian Romanoff was something different. He wondered if James and Lily Potter approved of who had taken in their son and if they were happy with the person he turned out to be.

Looking around the room filled with targets and training mats and strange machines that seemed to be for torture resistance training, Lisa repressed a shudder that threatened to run through her. Hadrian had said that everyone in the tower used the training room as well as the more... personalized... training rooms, something she didn't exactly understand but she had an inkling. The memory of seeing Miss Natalie go against the Whomping Willow without breaking a sweat flashed through her mind and something in her snapped into place. She looked at the strange devices with a determined glint in her eye.

A ghost of a smile made its way across Wayne's lips as he watch Hadrian and Terry bicker with Hadrian's uncle. Terry hadn't seemed to waste any time in treating the man like they'd known each other for years, something Wayne could admit that he was a bit envious of. Glancing at Lisa, he saw that she was staring at the work out equipment with an unholy gleam and he made a note to be the one she came to with questions. He absently thought that someone should really introduce her to the Internet or keep her very far away from it. A startled yelp from Hadrian caught Wayne's attention and he turned back to the green eyed boy only to see that he was pinned to the ground by a net.

"Where are you getting these arrows? You don't even have your quiver!" Hadrian wiggled about under the net, trying to loosen the knotted rope enough for him to slip free.

"Ah, come on, Houdini, you'd think you'd be better at this." Clint teased.

Wayne noticed that even though Hadrian was glowering darkly at his uncle, his lips were twitching
as he fought back a smile. A smile that had been on his face nearly the entire time he had been showing them around his home. Wayne could see that Hadrian missed his home and his family especially, and he couldn't understand why he chose to stay at Hogwarts.

Terry felt the back of his neck itch and he looked over at Wayne, who was looking at Hadrian with slight confusion.

Terry walked over to the silent boy and placed a hand on his shoulder. "Because of us, Wayne-boy, you should know this."

Wayne only looked at him like he was crazy. Terry shrugged, knowing that the quiet boy would get it one day.

Hadrian dropped a large binder on the table. Across the top of the binder was label that read 'Wonders of New York' in large block letters and under it was a smaller label that said 'Don't Worry, Tony's Paying For Everything.'

"What is this?" Terry asked as he pulled the binder towards him to get a better look at it.

"Auntie Pepper put together a bunch of things that we can do based on what I said you liked. As awesome as she is she probably marked up a bunch of different schedules and itineraries for us to choose from." Hadrian explained.

Lisa reached forward to grab the binder from Terry only to have her hand slapped away.

Hadran rolled his eyes and turned to Wayne. "Auntie Pepper said she put in some time for you and Loki to work on whatever together if you want."

"I would like that," Wayne said with a small, grateful smile.

"Why would we want to go to this Xavier's Institute?" Terry asked, his eyes focused on the laminate covered page with a picture of the school.

"Oh, I told my friend Bobby about some of my friends from Hogwarts visiting and he said he wanted to meet you guys. He asked Professor X, the guy who runs the school, and as long as we call ahead we can visit them." Hadrian explained, but the blank looks he was still getting made him realize they didn't know what kind of school Xavier's was. "Xavier's Institute for Gifted Students is a school for people with mutant abilities. It's sort of like Hogwarts, but instead of teaching kids how to use their magic, it teaches them how to control their abilities."

"What sort of abilities?" Neville asked, clearly interested.

"Well, Bobby can control ice. He can freeze the water in the air, or basically any liquid, and he's starting to train his new ability to turn his body into a reinforced ice construct." Hadrian couldn't help but to smile at the incredulous looks on his friends' faces. "There's a girl at the school named Kitty who can walk through walls and levitate. And Piotr can turn his skin into a nearly impenetrable metal and has super strength."

"Whoa." Lisa breathed.

Hadrian chuckled. "Yeah. Anyway, Bobby wants to meet you guys and see what sort of magic we can all do."

"Are there any witches or wizards who also have mu-tant abilities?" Terry asked curiously,
wondering how that would work, especially if their ability was something that magic couldn't replicate.

"Uh, there was a girl in higher grade at my old school who could turn into a guinea pig without going through the Animagus process but no one was sure if it was an mutation or a special ability of her magic, like being a metamorphmagus. Uncle Bruce has a theory about the X-gene that gives people mutant abilities not being compatible with whatever gene gives witches and wizards their magic so whichever is stronger will cancel the other out, but he hasn't done much research on the subject." Hadrian said, pulling out his phone to show them the few pictures he had of his mutant friends. One showed Bobby with an ice encased fist, one was of Kitty's torso and head sticking out of a wall as she talked with Jubilee, one showed Warren with his wings outstretched. "Anyway, if you guys are okay with it, we can visit the school. Though I'll tell you now, if you see an angry looking man with sideburns and a cigar whatever you do, don't annoy him,"

"Oi, why're you looking at me?" Terry looked offended.

Hadrian only looked at him intently before continuing, "I'm serious. The guy is... look, just don't. Don't ask him a lot of questions, don't make any high pitched noises around him, and definitely don't call him 'Claws'."

"Do I want to know why anyone would call him 'Claws'?" Wayne asked with a raised eyebrow.

"Probably not," Hadrian shrugged. He had no idea how to accurately describe the infamous Wolverine to people who didn't even know what a mutant was and he wasn't going to bother with trying. Besides, the man had to be seen to be believed.

"Well, I'd like to check the place out." Terry said as Lisa finally managed to steal the binder from him. "I saw some books on elementals in your library in the magical section, maybe we could compare ice and water elementals to this Bobby guy, if he's okay with it."

"I'm okay with that as long as we check out the science and history museums you promised to show me." Lisa bargained.

"Like there was any chance of me getting out of that," Hadrian said dramatically, leaning into Neville for mock support. Lisa tsked and muttered something about prats under her breath. "We of course also have to check out Statue of Liberty because you aren't real tourists otherwise. And you haven't actually had the New York experience until you've eaten a hot dog from a street vendor, this is fact."

Neville and Lisa didn't look like they believed him but Terry and Wayne nodded their heads.

Just as Neville opened his mouth to ask something an earsplitting alarm went off. The kids covered their ears in an attempt to drown out the sound. Hadrian recovered from the shock first and pushed the binder off the table before laying his hand flat down on the surface. A ring of light surrounded his hand followed by the soft sound of something clicking that went unheard before a seam appeared in the middle of the table. Hadrian quickly pushed both parts in opposite directions, revealing a hidden box filled with familiar wristbands with the outline of a spider on them. He grabbed five pairs and tossed two to each of his friends.

"Put them on!" Hadrian commanded as he tugged his own on. "If something happens and you lose your wand, focus your magic towards your hands or wrists and aim at the problem. No time for questions, just do it, Lisa!"

"JARVIS, what's going on?"
"A portal has opened above the Stark Industries Science Fair and creatures of unknown origins are currently making their way through." JARVIS explained quickly. "Your mother has sent orders for you to take your friends to a panic room and go on lockdown until she or I contact you."

"Got it, J," Hadrian turned to see his friends looking at him anxiously. "Follow me. The fair isn't that close to where we are but it's still close enough that one of those things could make their way here."

"Now!" He added when no one moved.

A window suddenly shattered, spraying the kids with shards of glass. Too late Hadrian and Lisa cast the shielding spell and all of them were cut, though Wayne got the worse of it as a jagged shard embedded itself just below his left eye.

"Sh-" Hadrian's curse was cut off when something jumped through the now open window. The shape of it was impossible to guess as it seemed to constantly change and rearrange. The one clear thing about the creature were its absurdly sharp looking claws. Hadrian paled. "Run! Get to my mom's room, it's the closest!"

"What about-"

Neville grabbed Lisa's hand and pulled her along as he ran towards Miss Natalie's room, ducking as soon as he opened the door, which was a good thing considering several darts shot past where his head would have been and embedded themselves in the opposite wall. Neville didn't slow down, not wanting to see what other surprises the woman might have set up, pulling Lisa further into the room towards the back wall. Terry and Wayne followed close behind them, both of them just barely escaping getting burnt by a sudden blast of flame.

Hadrian appeared next, jumping forward through the doorway and flipping over, dodging the next trap. After rolling into a landing and righting himself, he turned and raised his wand before casting the strongest shield he could manage. He briefly thought of dismantling the still hidden traps his mother no doubt had but decided they could act as the last line of defense in case the shield fell.

"Hadrian Gallahad Romanoff, what the hell is going on!" Terry shouted as soon as he realized that they were no longer in any immediate danger. His hand was wrapped tightly around his wand, his knuckles white, and there was a noticeable sheen of sweat on his brow.

Neville's entire face had gone red as well as the tips of his ears and he looked ready to collapse onto the bed he was sitting against; Lisa was visibly shaking, her left braid undone, and her fingers tapping erratically against her legs; Wayne had gone white and was doing his best to keep from making eye contact with anyone while raking his nails down his arm, leaving bloodied lines behind.

Hadrian was the most composed, with only slight panic in his eyes and his cheeks a bright red. His hair looked even more unruly than usually, which was quite a feat.

Hadrian opened his mouth to respond before realizing something. "My middle name isn't Gallahad,"

"Really? That's what you're focusing on? Not the..." Lisa flailed her hands around as if that meant anything. A sudden loud crash from outside the room shocked her into screaming. "That!"

"This is New York," Hadrian shrugged as if he wasn't bothered but Wayne could see him tightening and relaxing his grip on his wand and that his whole body was tense, like when he was in the middle of a duel and was ready to move at the slightest provocation.
"Are you telling me," Terry started dangerously. "That this sort of thing happens all the time? And you didn't bother to warn us?"

Hadrian ran a hand through his hair sheepishly. "Yeah, that was my mistake. I guess I kinda took for granted that everyone knows about how New York is pretty much a Hellmouth, even those who live almost completely in the magical world. But I didn't realize just how insular the British magical community is, but I thought with all the stories I told you'd caught on. I remember thinking I would have to explain about it all after we found the Cerberus but as things went on, like I said, I thought you realized how crazy things were here. My bad."

"Your bad? Your bad!" Terry shouted, looking ready to leap at his friend and strangle him. "You forget to tell us that dangerous things like this apparently happen all the time until we're nearly killed by some sort of creatures and all you can say is, 'my bad?' I ought to hex you until you decide that Malfoy's the love of your life!"

"Harsh," Wayne said plainly. Terry only pointed at him emphatically.

"Uh," Neville spoke up hesitantly, staring past his friends. "Maybe we could finish this another time."

As one Lisa, Hadrian, Terry and Wayne turned to see one of the things in the shielded doorway, not doing anything except standing there. It made no move to test out the strength of the shield nor did it leave to find supposed easier targets.

Terry swallowed nervously. "So, Hadrian, how strong is that shield of yours?"

"It's the strongest one Loki's taught me."

"On a scale of one to Loki?" Wayne asked.

"About a Flitwick,"

"Wonderful,"

"Is there any other way out of here?" Lisa asked, glancing around the room for an exit.

Hadrian paused. "Through the vents. There are others but they need a code so intruders can't use them. The codes are changed a lot and I wasn't here the last time they were so we have to use the vents."

Eyeing the wider than normal vent, Wayne asked, "Can they hold us?"

"Uncle Tony had all the vents reinforced when he found out about Uncle Clint's nesting habit."

Hadrian explained. He jumped onto his mom's bed for better reach and quickly swung the vent open, thankful that Uncle Clint's habit had resulted in none of the vents actually being screwed shut. "Lisa, you go first since you're the best duelist of you four, then Wayne, Terry and Neville. I'll go last in case that thing manages to get in. JARVIS is connected everywhere so he'll guide you where you need to go. Someone in the middle will need to cast a lumos so Lisa and I can have our wands ready to defend us."

Hadrian held his hand out to Lisa and she took quickly. He lifted her up, not taking the time to use the levitating charm, and held her steady as she pulled herself into the vent. Terry stepped forward next, using Harry's linked hands as a step followed by Neville. Wayne gave Hadrian a hard look before he allowed himself to be lifted up as well.
Hadrian bounced on his mother's bed a few times before jumping high and catching onto the vent, hauling himself up. Once he was fully inside he banged his fist against the side of the vent, knocking the cover back down to cover them.

"JARVIS, we need to get to a safe room." Hadrian said anxiously.

"Of course, Hadrian. The closest to your position that doesn't have any hazardous obstacles is the Green Containment Room. Go forward straight and turn left down the third vent." JARVIS directed.

"Any news on the others?"

"They're currently combating the largest cluster of the creatures while doing their best to keep them all contained." JARVIS answered swiftly. "Your mother is fine." He added knowingly.

Hadrian let out a relieved sigh.

Guided by the light from Terry's wand, the kids quickly followed JARVIS' directions to the safe room. Hadrian was straining his ears in an effort to hear anything that could mean one of those things were coming near them.

"Forty seconds until arrival." JARVIS announced.

"Is that thing still at my mom's door or?" Hadrian asked.

"And do you know how many there are?" Terry added.

"The creature is no longer at your mother's door and seems to have found its way to its brethren in main foyer, of which there is a total of six." JARVIS answered.

"One for each of us, and another for a tie breaker." Wayne commented dryly, getting a snort out of Hadrian and a shake of the head from Lisa.

Lisa came to a stop in front of a grate. She carefully pushed it open, cringing when it banged against the wall and made a loud clanking noise. Seeing that there wasn't anything she could safely land on that was near by, she pointed her wand at the large couch against the left wall and cast the levitation spell. It was much heavier than the things she was used to lifting and she nearly dropped it several times. Finally she managed to move to underneath the vent.

"Here goes," Lisa muttered before letting her body fall out of the vent. She landed awkwardly on the couch, bounced a few times, but wasn't hurt.

Once she collected herself, she moved out of the way to let Wayne come down next. He didn't land much better than she did. Terry somehow managed to smack his knee against the wall while Neville landed softly on his back.

Hadrian jumped out with practiced ease, landing on the couch with his hands and flipping over into a crouch on the floor. Then he dodged to the side of the jelly leg jinx Terry sent his way.

"Next time, maybe warn your friends that they're visiting a city that's apparently worse than the Forbidden Forest!" Terry yelled as he shot off another jinx.

"I'm sorry!" Hadrian said as he ducked.

"Sorry my arse!"
"I'm ser-agh!" Hadrian had been so focused on dodging Terry's spells that he failed to notice the one coming from behind him. His knees buckled together and sent him falling to the floor.

Terry paused, a spell half said. "Way to go, Nev!"

"Terry, I don't think now is the time for this. You can turn Hadrian pink and inside out after whatever those creatures are are gone. Hadrian, we will be having a conversation about this later." Neville said sternly, pointing his wand at the green eyed boy in emphasis. Hadrian held his hands up in surrender.

Hadrian suddenly let out a strange yelp and grabbed at his shoulder. "Lisa!"

"What? It wasn't me," Lisa gestured toward Wayne, who looked back impassively.

Terry seemed to be in thought. "You've seen things like that and you're still scared of trolls?"

"Have you ever smelled a troll?" Hadrian teased. "Seriously, though, usually when I'm attacked by giant rage things I know that someone with experience in taking down giant rage things is nearby. At Hogwarts none of the Slytherins had any proper training or experience, and honestly, if Quirrell hadn't warned everyone so we would be on guard, it would've been a lot worse than a few students going into shock." The others nodded in agreement. The Slytherins really had been lucky that night.

"At least we'll have a war story to bring back to the Knights of Loki." Terry commented lightly.

"Pardon me but it appears that the creatures at the science fair have been dealt with. The Avengers are returning to the tower to deal with the ones here while the others pick off any other stragglers. No injuries to report." JARVIS explained.

"Oh, thank Heimdall," Hadrian breathed. "This'll be over soon. That was quicker than usual, though."

Wayne raised an eyebrow at the name but refrained from saying anything. He had gotten used to Hadrian's unusual praises - it was hard not to when Hadrian was the only one saying Odin while everyone else said Merlin - and had long since decided he didn't really care. If anything, he just figured it had to do with his uncles Loki and Thor.

"And when it is all over, we can all sit down and have a nice, long talk about informing your friends of potentially dangerous visits." Terry said, his voice dripping condescension.

Hadrian's face flushed in embarrassment - something his friends had never seen happen before - and he ran a hand nervously through his hair.

"Estimate arrival time... thirteen seconds." JARVIS said.

"To the tower or this room?" Hadrian asked.

The safe room door slid open and his mother stalked in, a fierce look in her eyes appearing when she saw the dozens.

"That answers that."

"Hadrian," Natasha reached out and pulled her son to her in a tight hold. Hadrian wrapped his arms around her, ignoring the alien blood that was getting on his clothes. She murmured something in Russian and kissed the top of his head.
"We're all okay, no one's got too badly hurt. We ran into your room and I put up that shield Uncle Loki taught me then made our way here through the vents. Those things never got close to us but we have some cuts from a window breaking. Wayne got the worse." Hadrian explained, pointing at the still bleeding gash under Wayne's eye.

Wayne reached a hand up to his injury, wincing when he realized how close it was to his eye. He had honestly forgotten about it during all the excitement and now the pain was returning.

"And you didn't think to give him one of the healing potions stocked up here?" Natasha asked as she moved to one of the cabinets and took out a clear jar of a deep green liquid. She beckoned Wayne over and spread a generous amount on his cut. Small fragments left from the glass were pulled out as the wound stitched itself together, healing without a scar.

"I, uh, forgot about those actually." Hadrian admitted. He ran his hand through his hair once again, feeling like an idiot.

Natasha tsked at her son but refrained from scolding him for the moment. She had never done so in front of his friends before and wouldn't start now. She could lecture him on keeping his head clear and remembering the necessary during times like these later.

"I'm glad you're all safe," she said instead.

Terry glanced around the room at everyone, apparently coming to a conclusion. "You know, this feels sort of anti-climatic."

Hadrian sat uncomfortably on the edge of his bed. Neville, Lisa, Terry and Wayne were sitting on overstuffed bean bags in front of him, stern expressions on their faces.

"I'm s-"

"We know you're sorry," Lisa started.

"But that doesn't change the fact that you put us in danger," Terry finished. "You know that none of us know about the muggle world like you do so even if this New York Hellmouth thing is normal like you said then you should still realize that we wouldn't have a clue."

"We still would've come. We just would've liked to be warned before we got attacked," Neville added softly.

Hadrian looked at Wayne who wasn't facing him anymore. Instead he was staring intently at the picture of a younger Hadrian and his mom sitting on his desk.

"What's going to happen now," Terry said, pulling Hadrian's attention back to him. "Is you're going to tell us all about New York."

Hadrian nodded.

"And your sixth birthday."

Hadrian rolled his eyes. "Well, I guess you could say it all started during World War Two when the legendary Captain America disappeared while saving all of New York..."

"Wait, so his name is actually von Doom? That's just asking for trouble."
"Yeah, it's almost like he was doomed from the start."

"Terry, you should be ashamed of yourself for that."

"Your Uncle Tony just told the whole world that he was actually Iron Man even when he didn't have to? I don't know whether to respect the guy or not."

"That's okay. That's how everyone feels."

"Can I punch this Ross guy?"

"Lisa, I love ya but no, you can't."

"Can I?"

"Neville!"

"Spider-Man? You think we could hire him to mess with Ron?"

"And whatever you guys do if you see a man wearing red and black with two swords talking to himself then just turn around and run away. Trust me."

"But why-"

"Just do it."

"What's a Hellmouth?"

"Ooh, you guys are gonna love what I have to show you."

"Am I forgiven now- ow! Wayne!"

"Now you are."

"Now tell us about your sixth birthday!"

"Nothing happened! I ate cake and turned six!"

Hadrian leaned into his mom's side. She placed a gentle hand on his head. They were watching his friends getting comfortable in front of the tv in the penthouse - Neville and Lisa had taken over the couch, Wayne was laying on the floor and Terry was practically upside down in one of the arm chairs. Bruce and Steve had worked together to make up a bunch of snacks for them to eat while they watched Firefly.

"I really messed up, didn't I, Momma?"

"A bit, little one. But we were all amiss in giving them proper warning about here but now you know better and you're going to make it up to them."

"Or I could blow their minds by having them watch Merlin."

"Ew! Momma!"

Neville and Wayne shared an amused look as they held Terry and Lisa respectively by their shoulders to keep them from bouncing in place. Hadrian and his family had made good on his promise to take Lisa to as many museums as possible and despite having already visited two Lisa and Terry were still just as ecstatic.

Terry had nearly given himself a nosebleed at the science museum trying to soak in everything he saw. Hadrian had valiantly tried to keep his friends away from the Stark showcases but had ultimately failed under the combined academic hunger of both Lisa and Terry.

"This is gonna be the last one then we're gonna take Neville to see Central Park and check out that comic shop I told you about," Hadrian repeated for the umpteenth time but he felt that he had to since his eagle friends were so focused on seeing the next museum.

"And-

"-then tomorrow Terry is take the tour at Stark Industries then go stay the night at the Xavier Institute," Terry said in sync with Hadrian without taking his eyes off his goal.

Hadrian gave him a strange look but didn't say anything.

As Neville stood in an awed stupor at the park Hadrian and Lisa were barely keeping back their laughter. Terry - who was standing closest to the Gryffindor - reached out and poked his cheek, not getting any reaction.

Wayne had disappeared somewhere.

"I want this in my backyard," Neville breathed.

Hadrian moved over and clapped Neville on the shoulder. "Way to sound like a supervillain there, Nev."

Neville turned to face Hadrian, a somber expression on his face. He leaned in and whispered, "Get this in my backyard, Harrison."

"Welcome to the Stark Industries tour. My name is Darcy Lewis and I'll be your totally awesome guide for the day."

Terry looked to his left and right, confused as to why Hadrian's aunt Darcy was acting like there was a group of people instead of just him. Darcy just continued to smile beautifully so Terry shrugged it off and went with it.

"We're going to start in the most vital place of any building filled with elite scientist... the coffee room."

Wayne stood silently next to Loki, his hand gripping his suitcase tightly.

Hadrian had done him a favor and distracted the others by taking them to a butcher shop - according to him if you wanted to see New Yorkers in their natural habitat the best places to do so were the
subway, at the butcher and anywhere during rush hour.

"Calm yourself, young Wayne. This journey is designed to help you become one with your wolf spirit. There is no need to worry," Loki assured quietly.

Wayne gave him a shaky smile of gratitude. He had known that he and Loki were going take a trip, just the two of them, so that he could get the help and support he needed but it was still nerve wracking. He hadn't felt this out of sorts since before he had learned what he really was.

Hadrian's uncle Remy had given him surprisingly in depth advice on having a wolf prowling around in his mind and soul but he wasn't well versed in anything Lythari and had told him to wait for Loki's guidance.


Loki raised his hand, blue light crackling at the tip of his fingers. With a dramatic and precise arc he ripped open the air in front of him, leaving a portal as tall as he and wide enough for a troll to squeeze through.

Wayne peered curiously through it, his eyes widening when he caught sight of an expanse of impossibly tall trees with leaves of green and blue and gold. Birds of varying sizes - from infinitesimally small to unnaturally large - made of technicolor flitted back and forth across the view. A creature that looked like the child of a radioactive jaguar and a mutant gorilla hung from a sturdy tree branch by its dark purple tail, chomping on a soft pink fruit.

"What is this place?" Wayne asked, hushed. It felt wrong to speak too loud.


Wayne jolted where he stood. "So this place is..."

"Where you hail from? Quite so."

Wayne had always wanted to know where he came from, where his birth family came from. His parents had never resented him for it and he had never felt anything except love for them but there had always been a part of him that had longed to know.

Now he was just filled with the urge to run run run.

"Sirius, there is absolutely no reason to have a keg of firewhiskey at party with children!" Pepper admonished.

"The pictures of James and I from our second year beg to differ," Sirius said cheekily. He had been over the moon when Hadrian had shown him all the photo albums Lily and James had left for their son, one of which had pictures from the night James and Sirius had managed to bribe an upper year into giving them two bottles of firewhiskey.

Pepper simply stared pointedly at the keg until Sirius sighed and Vanished it. He had already known there was no way he would have gotten away with the keg with Pepper in charge, but it was still fun to try. He doubted he would have allowed the thought to even fully formed if he had to worry about Pepper and Lily. The picture that painted made him shiver, earning a raised eyebrow from Pepper, which only worsened the impossible fear.
Pepper, Lily, and Natasha together would be the stuff of nightmares. He wondered if it was the hair.

Sirius looked shrewdly at the red haired woman in front of him. "It has to be the hair," he muttered, much to Pepper's confusion.

"It's totally the hair," Terry commented as he walked past them holding a package of shiny party hats.

Sirius pointed at the passing boy for dramatic emphasis, a trait he had picked up from Tony. "That boy is a genius!"

Pepper gave Sirius a long look then threw her hands up and shook her head. "I give up. I don't want to know and you're not going to tell me." She declared before she stalked off.

"Auntie Maria!" Hadrian's voice rang out from near the elevator.

Maria Hill stepped through into the penthouse, dressed casually in jeans and a nice navy blue sweater. Sirius had no doubt she had at least three knives and two guns on her. "Hello, Hadrian. How has your holiday been so far?"

"Awesome! Except for the, y'know, hell dimension demon things." Hadrian pouted.

"Yes, those tend to be a downer." Maria reached out to ruffle his hair, making Hadrian's pout even more pronounced. "Where are these friends of yours?"

"Terry and Neville are helping Auntie Pepper put everything together, Lisa's with my mom doing something I'm afraid to ask about, and Wayne's meditating with Uncle Bruce." Hadrian answered, gesturing widely behind him.

Maria looked over Hadrian's head to see a boy with dark hair and slightly too large ears charming streamers to hang freely in the air. Hadrian followed her gaze and saw Neville using the charm Flitwick told them was used to place the candles in the Great Hall.

"That's Neville," Hadrian said. "I think you'll like him. He reminds me of Uncle Bruce and Agent Uncle."

Maria smiled at the comparison. "Well, then, I can't see anyone not liking him. I'll go introduce myself. See you later, alligator."

"In a while, crocodile," Hadrian called back.

"Do I want to know?" Hadrian spun on his heels to see Lisa standing behind him.

Hadrian shrugged. "Just one of those things." He explained quite eloquently in his opinion.

Lisa rolled her eyes. "Is anyone else coming? I forgot to ask earlier."

"Peter, Bobby, Kitty, Piotr, Johnny, Daniel, Jubilee, Spike and a few others I think." Hadrian said, counting the names off on his fingers. "What's His Name kept talking about crossovers and fix it clichés so who knows."

"What's His Name?" Lisa questioned.

Hadrian visibly shuddered. "Trust me, you don't wanna say his name. He'll pop up out of nowhere with Spiderman handcuffed to him."
"You're not afraid to say You-Know-Who's name but you won't say whoever this guy's name is?"

Hadrian grabbed Lisa by her shoulders and stared intently into her eyes. "Lisa, I need you to trust me on this. Should you ever learn of you I'm speaking of, never, and I mean never, say his name. He's like Beetlejuice." He said seriously.

"Who's Beetlejuice?"

"JARVIS, queue up Beetlejuice! And remind me not to say his name anymore."

Albus sat in his office, thinking over what had happened so far while rolling a lemon drop around in his mouth.

Harry Potter had failed to make his triumphant return to the wizarding world after spending ten lonely years with his relatives. All attempts to track the boy down had failed, especially as the trail had gone cold after ten years. Minerva had scolded him for not bothering to check in on where the boy supposedly was over the last decade and he was inclined to agree. If he had only checked in sooner then perhaps he would've had better luck in finding the boy.

Albus had gone to the Ministry to see if guardianship of Harry Potter had been given to someone other than himself and Petunia Dursley without his knowledge but all information on the boy was the same as it was all those years ago. He had even checked with the Underage Use of Magic office to see if there were any strange cases of particularly strong accidental magic only to find that there were no reported cases of Harry Potter's accidental magic past November first of nineteen-eighty-one. That at least gave him a more accurate timeline of when Harry Potter had disappeared.

It also disproved his theory of Sirius being behind it as the young man was still wrongly imprisoned at the time. Perhaps Sirius and Remus had spent all these years searching for the boy and hadn't come to him for help for whatever reason, though whether they knew that Albus himself didn't know where the boy was was still in question.

He couldn't move forward with any of his half formed plans until he had a better understanding with what he was dealing with. He needed to not only know where Harry Potter had gone but who had taken him and why they felt the need to keep him hidden even after all these years. He doubted that he had been found by followers of Tom as he was sure that they would have boasted of ridding the world of the Boy-Who-Lived to their fellows. It was possible that a Light aligned family had taken the boy in to protect him and didn't wish to have him returned to the Dursleys so they kept him out of the loop but there was no explanation on why they wouldn't allow him to attend Hogwarts.

He had briefly been tempted to use the blood of Harry's relatives as part of a much stronger and borderline illegal tracking spell but discarded the idea for its close relation to darker blood rituals. For now, at least.

Perhaps he could hire one of those specialized Aurors that the muggles called private detectives. Even if the detective couldn't find the exact location of the boy he could possibly narrow it down. They would likely find nothing if a wizarding family had been behind the disappearance but there was always the possibility that a sympathetic muggle had seen Harry's placement at the Dursleys and had intervened. The problem with hiring someone was that he hadn't the funds to pay for someone with the means and resources to properly search for the boy. He had thought that being Harry Potter's magical guardian and holder of his trust key would've allowed him to take monies from the boy's trust vault as long as he justified it as being for the boy's care but the goblins had blocked him at every turn. He couldn't even use what had been bequeathed to him in the Potters' will as he had it sealed and if he was to finally allow it to be read, the others mentioned would be have to be notified.
and they would learn of things Albus wished to keep hidden.

The only control he had left over the Potter vaults was that he would be notified about any updates to them thanks to a former student who had been accepted as an apprentice to the goblins.

He would need to find an appropriate family to house the boy with as the blood wards he had been counting on to keep him safe and hidden were no longer an option. The Weasleys were staunch supporters of the Light and had fought alongside the Potters as part of the Order of the Phoenix. Money would be an issue as even with the oldest two having left to start their own careers they were still on a tight budget with five children to care for. However, that could be remedied by supplying a hefty stipend from the Potter vaults once he was again in control of them. The youngest boy, Ronald, was Harry's age and could easily befriend the boy and introduce him to the British wizarding world. Ginevra would be delighted to live with her hero so there would be no trouble there as he was sure the girl was doted on as the youngest and only girl. The added benefit of having the protective wards Albus would need to lay would only sweeten the deal for them to take the boy in.

Molly was a mother first and foremost and would like nothing more to take in the boy to care for him. She could even tell the boy stories of parents fighting for the Light during the war. Albus could have Hagrid put together one of his scrapbooks with pictures of young Lily and James and gift it to Harry through Molly as he was sure the boy hadn't any photos of his own. Arthur's standing at the Ministry would rise when they found out he was the guardian of the Boy-Who-Lived, which would give them both more clout when it came time to vote for new laws and legislations to be passed or vetoed.

Of course, the boy would have to go through a crash course in order to be caught up to the rest of his peers or he would have to be held back a year. If it came to that it would allow him another year to make sure things didn't go awry again and would give the boy more time to make strong connections with Light families as he knew Molly would never allow the boy to speak with anyone she didn't approve of.

Having the Weasleys take the boy in would also ingrain a feeling of gratitude which he would wish to repay through fighting against the Dark and keeping his adoptive family safe.

But before any of that could happen, he had to get Harry Potter back.

SHIELD Agent Hector Rodriguez stared in wonder at the sight before him, ignoring the harsh freezing wind.

He pulled out his communicator with shaking hands and dialed back to headquarters. He said nothing until the gruff voice of the director was heard.

"Sir, you're never going to believe this."
Albus waited somewhat impatiently in line at Gringotts. He normally could have gotten ushered straight to the front of the line but he had chosen a day that would have the bank especially busy for a reason. The wizarding world tended to have a problem with leaving things to the last minute and preparing for their children's return to Hogwarts was no exception. He tended to have his business done beforehand so as not to have to deal with it but if he didn't then he wouldn't have the cover being in plain sight it would offer. Making a show of having important business as he was wont to do wouldn't be good for keeping this visit relatively low profile.

Finally after the people in front of him were served, one a braggart of a woman who made quite the show of pulling out a large sum of galleons, Albus reached the front of the line.

"Good day to you, Mr. Kilsharp," Albus greeted genially, knowing how much the goblins hated to be disrespected. It was a shame the teller sneered at him despite his politeness. "I would like to request the good company of one of your wizard workers, a Mr. Shaun Morgan."

Kilsharp snarled quite harshly at what Albus considered to be quite an easy request, especially among all the no doubt demanding ones brought on by the stress of school restarting. The teller turned and spoke in low, clipped tones to one of the free goblins before turning back to face Albus.

"Worker Morgan is free at the moment. Step aside and wait for an escort." Kilsharp dismissed.

Albus chuckled. "Thank you for your time, Mr. Kilsharp," He paid no mind to the guttural growl that followed after him as he walked away.

Returning a few of the happy greetings sent his way by former students, Albus made his way to the side of the bank to wait for one of the lower goblins to escort him to the room where their human colleagues were stationed. It was really a shame that humans employed by Gringotts weren't allowed their own personal offices like that of the goblins workers but Albus supposed that it was petty attempt on their part to get back at the disrespect and restrictions they were given. No matter, all cubicles in the shared room were equipped with privacy wards so that one's business would not be overheard by another. He would add a few of his own charms, of course, in case the goblin magic was not quite enough. His business with young Shaun was of the utmost importance and it wouldn't do if it were to be leaked to the public that he needed to ask for information on the Potter vaults when he should have all he needed to know as Harry Potter's magical guardian.

"Ah, Professor Dumbledore!" A widely grinning man with the most unassuming air about him appeared in front of Albus. "What a wonderful chance of fate!"

Albus smiled at the man, who seemed to be another grateful former student of his, though he could not recall the man's name.

"Jame Evanson," The man offered. "I wouldn't have figured you would've remembered me personally, what with the war going on in my years and all. I was a few years ahead of James and
Lily Potter, you know. Wasn't the best student I could've been but I managed to survive with my nose intact." Jame laughed lightly at his own joke, inviting Albus to do the same.

"It does warm my heart to see that not all of the good students of Hogwarts were lost during the war."

Jame nodded his head sagely. "Too right there, sir. Well, it warms my heart to know that my own little Harold will be able to experience the wonders of Hogwarts under your special brand of guidance."

Albus paused. "Harold, you say?"

"Yes, sir. Little Harold Evanson, set to start Hogwarts next year. Hopefully by then those new wards everyone has been blabbing about will be in place. After all, there's no such thing as too much protection." Jame continued, not noticing that Albus' mind had stopped and restarted in quick succession. "Well, I should be going. Have lots to do for the missus. It was nice meeting you, Professor Dumbledore."

Albus barely noticed when the cheerful man walked away, the bright grin on his face fading only to be replaced with a smirk similar to that of a fierce woman he once met.

Before Albus could think too much on what had caught his attention, a goblin appeared before him and said to follow him.

The goblin - who hadn't introduced himself - led him through several twists and turns and sometimes seemed even to lead him in circles before they came to the iron door marked in Gobbledygook with the symbol for what Albus understood to be for 'human.'

The goblin knocked twice in the same place then pushed the door open with the flat of his hand. The sudden bright lighting of the room made Albus squint his eyes as they adjusted to the change.

"You'll find Worker Morgan at work station four." And with that, the goblin turned on his heels and stalked off.

Albus shook his head at the blatant rudeness but soon put it out of his mind and made his way to where he had been directed. Shaun Morgan was sitting at his desk placed in between to walls of some kind of muggle component called plaster. As he took a seat, he could feel the privacy wards activate and discreetly cast his own privacy charms.

"Professor Dumbledore!" Shaun said, obviously surprised. "I didn't expect to see you so soon."

"Yes, well, I found my timetable to have cleared up enough for me to make my way here. It is a rather important visit." Albus refrained from saying his schedule had cleared up because he had done nearly everything he had to over the rest of the holiday in order to make the trip.

"Of course, Professor Dumbledore." Shaun shuffled through the papers and files strewn across his desk. "Ah, here! Not long ago we received a copy of a report from one of our branch banks that the Potter Main vaults were once again active. As the vaults belong to one of Gringotts' oldest and most influential clients all information was sent to Head Goblin Ragnok."

The mention of the head goblin reminded Albus that the Romanoff had the goblin under their employ. He would need to look into that at some point.

"The file I had access to doesn't have all the information, only that they were opened, a proxy was named and Harry Potter's trust vault was merged with the main vault. Who was named proxy and
who now has access to the vaults is marked out, I'm sorry to say." Shaun explained as he held out the thin file to Albus.

"That's quite alright, my boy. You've done all you could do." Albus had known it wouldn't be so easy to learn all he needed to know but he had hoped. Alas Shaun wasn't very high up at the bank and didn't have the clearance to know what he needed to know. Bill Weasley would perhaps have the necessary clearance to get the complete files but Albus didn't yet know if he would be able to get them with his job as a Curse Breaker.

Albus opened the file and quickly read through what little there was, which wasn't much more than what Shaun had told him.

"Have you had any luck on locating where this Kilrok is employed?" That would help him greatly in tracking down the missing boy.

"Yes, sir. He's stationed at one of the branch banks in North America."

"Hm," That certainly narrowed things down. He had a few contacts in America and Canada through the International Confederate. It shouldn't be too difficult to find the boy once he was able to accurately eliminate most of the possibilities. He hoped to be able to recognize the boy's magical signature as he faintly remembered it from that fateful Halloween night. The air around the cottage had practically been saturated in it. If not, unless whoever had taken the boy in had changed his appearance through potions, charms or magical adoption, then he should be able to recognize the boy who had his father's hair and his mother's distinctive green eyes.

It seemed that his idea to request help from Loki Skywalker would bear fruit after all. A wizard such as he would surely have contacts in the country where he lived. Between the unknown wizard's aid and his own considerable resources Harry Potter would be found and returned home.

Dean was the first to find them, though it wasn't very difficult to do so when a large, boisterous blond man had taken to carrying Hadrian around on his shoulders.

From his vantage point, Hadrian noticed Dean approaching first. "Hey, Dean, hey, people who are probably Dean's family." Dean's mother laughed while his little sister just waved happily. Hadrian patted the blond's head. "The big guy here is Thor,"

"Greetings to the friends of young Hadrian," Thor said happily, looking remarkably like an overgrown puppy.

"Thor and Loki?" Dean questioned. "Where's Hercules?"

"Hercules is a Roman demi-god, Thor and Loki are from Norse mythology." Hadrian corrected without much thought.

Dean shook his head in amusement. "Where's Miss Natalie?"

"Talking to Nev's Gran." Hadrian answered, pointing in their direction. "It's as scary as it sounds."

"I'll bet," Dean said with an exaggerated shudder. "Seamus is talking with his mum and I saw Su and Morag at one of the stands."

"Terry, Lisa and Neville went ahead and got a compartment for all of us. Terry wants to practice the Expansion charm so we should all fit. Wayne is having a little pow-wow with Uncle Loki and Uncle Remy and his parents." Hadrian said, pointing in random directions. He paused before poking Thor's
shoulder, prompting the man to hold out his hand to Dean's mother. "Sorry for not actually introducing myself. I'm Hadrian Romanoff, world famous lion tamer!"

Dean rolled his eyes at his friend's theatrics. He would have to design a pin about this, though, and award one to whoever beat a Gryffindor during the Knights of Loki duels. And he could maybe make ones with snake charmer for Slytherin defeats; he wasn't sure what to use for Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw but he would figure it out.

"It's nice to meet you, Hadrian. I'm Melissa Thomas and this little angel is Diana." Dean's mother held up her young daughter, who giggled and waved again.

The warning bell for the train rang, signaling that the returning students should all board the train.

Hadrian patted Thor's head before jumping down off the man's shoulders, landing hard on his feet. "My mother would probably like to meet you if you'd like. I would introduce you to her but we should be getting on the train. It was nice to meet you, Mrs. Thomas."

Thor offered to escort Melissa to where Natasha was while Dean hugged his mom and sister goodbye before walking off with Hadrian to find the compartment the others had reserved.

"Tell mom I said I love her!" Hadrian called back to Thor.

"I shall, young Hadrian!"

"Your uncle's a bit strange." Dean commented lightly.

"Yeah, but... no, just yeah." Hadrian shrugged.

Dean laughed and pushed at Hadrian to board the train. Su, Morag and Seamus joined them in the hallway with Wayne making his way to them with only a few minutes to spare. Wayne nudged Hadrian and gave him an intent look. Hadrian nodded and stepped aside to let Wayne lead the way.

They found Lisa, Terry and Neville - along with Mandy and Parvati and Lavender of all people - not long after, not having to stop and check each compartment along the way thanks to Wayne. Terry did indeed use the Expansion charm and the compartment that normally only fit six comfortably was now large enough to seat fourteen.

"Way to go, Terry," Seamus congratulated the Ravenclaw as he sat down next to Dean. Parvati and Lavender sat next to them, looking the slightest bit uncomfortable since they didn't spend a lot of time with anyone else in the compartment but relaxed when everyone just treated their presence as normal.

Hadrian to the window seat with Wayne sitting next to him and Terry, Lisa and Neville sitting across from him. Mandy, Morag and Su sat down next to Wayne, leaving two seats open next to them.

They spent the train ride talking about their holiday; what they got, thanking each other for the gifts they received, what trips they made, what parties they went to. Parvati and Lavender took great delight in informing everyone of all the societal scandals that had happened over the break. Lisa could hardly contain herself as she told their friends all about New York, though she kept the hell dimension attack and the difference in underage magic laws to herself. Seamus didn't care about museums and conventions, instead wanting to hear all about the Romanoff family and embarrassing childhood stories.

It was only then that Terry realized he never found out about Hadrian's sixth birthday.
No one except the trolley lady stopped by - which for some reason sent Hadrian, Lisa and Terry into slight hysterics - and between the twelve of them they unloaded her of most of her stock.

Hadrian watched his friends chat happily and smiled, glad that his mom had allowed him to return. He only hoped nothing else would happen.

Immediately after that thought he felt like slapping himself for jinxing it.

Filius Flitwick sat in between Severus Snape and Pomona Sprout as they and Poppy Pomfrey and Minerva McGonagall waited for the headmaster to make his appearance. It wasn't like the man to call for a staff meeting and not already be in his office nor call so close to the arrival of the returning students. Though it would be considered disrespectful Filius knew that if Albus didn't show up soon they would all make their way to the Great Hall. Missing a meeting with the headmaster was one thing, letting the whole student body of Hogwarts go unsupervised was another.

"What do you suppose this is about?" Poppy asked, smoothing out her skirts.

"What else?" Severus sneered. "The Potter brat, no doubt."

Minerva rolled her eyes. "Oh, do hush, Severus. Regardless of your feelings for the boy's father, justified or not, the fact remains that he's missing and needs to be found. And not only because of his status. I would hope that should any child disappear, it would be looked into," she added when Severus opened his mouth, most likely to accuse the lost boy of just that.

Before the potions professor could find a point to argue the door opened to reveal Albus Dumbledore wearing a grim expression.

"Albus, what is going on?" Minerva asked.

"I have some information on a very important matter." Albus said, ignoring Severus' disgusted scoff.

"Well? What have you found?" Pomona questioned urgently.

Albus made his way to his desk, sitting down as though he had the weight of the world on his shoulders. His blue eyes didn't have their usual benevolent twinkle. He looked into each of their eyes in turn before looking away. They all refrained from commenting on feeling the light probe of Legilimency.

"Harry Potter has indeed been kidnapped."

Filius felt what was going to happen a moment before it did. Protective magic spilled forth from Minerva, Poppy and Pomona, coating the room and its occupants with it. The charms professor was quite giddy at the action, knowing it could only mean good and amusing things.

"By who, Albus, by who!" Minerva demanded.

Albus sighed gravely. "I'm afraid I do not know just yet. I only learned of this when I was informed by Gringotts that the Potter Main vaults were once again active."

"Which could only happen with the last Potter's permission and proof of heritage." Poppy continued, looking stunned. "And if whoever has taken him were magical themselves."

Pomona was looking shrewdly at the headmaster. "That's not all, is it?"

"No, my dear, it isn't. It has also been brought to my attention that a proxy has been named, though
who it is has been blocked from my knowledge." Albus admitted.

"So you mean to tell me that there's some unknown witch or wizard out there who has control of the Potter vaults and we have no idea who it is?" Minerva asked incredulously.

"At the very least it means that Harry knows of his heritage and who he is." Poppy said, seemingly more to reassure herself than anyone else.

"But why keep him hidden? If Harry knows of who he is, what's stopping him from being able to return to the wizarding world proper?" Pomona wondered aloud. Filius held back a grin.

Albus sighed again, bringing the attention back on him. "What I have been able to discover is that the activation of the vaults was done in North America. It is quite possible that the boy is living under an assumed name, presumably that of whoever has taken him, and they don't wish to announce that they are responsible for the disappearance of the Boy-Who-Lived. With the business of the Potter vaults it means they cannot claim to not know who the boy is."

"Pardon me, but what do you expect us to with this information? Surely we cannot go to North America and search for the young man. Not only do none of us have the time to devote to such a thing, we would hardly be able to keep it secret for long and whoever has taken him in would be alerted." Filius argued, not sure exactly what Albus was hoping to get from this meeting.

"Of course not, Filius. I called for this meeting to inform of what I've learned as I know you all have contacts in North America." And could use those contacts to narrow down the search for Harry Potter, Filius finished in his head. "And so that you will understand if I have to take a sudden trip outside of my usual ones to deal with the Ministry and the International Confederate."

"But enough of that," Albus waved the whole thing off, the twinkle back in his eyes. "We must make our way to the Great Hall to greet our returning pupils," he dismissed them.

Just as they were making their way out the door Albus said his final piece. "Do keep in mind what I've said and keep it from the ears of others."

Filius nodded his agreement as he tried to decide whether or not to have the letter he was going to be sending to Natalie Romanoff be anonymous or not.

Something strange was going on with the first years.

It wasn't noticeable at first but as the days went by it became more and more obvious that they were up to something.

All of the Ravenclaw first years - Lisa Turpin, Terry Boot, Morag MacDougal, Mandy Brocklehurst, Su Li, Michael Corner, Padma Patil and Anthony Goldstein - had taken over the library. No one was sure exactly what they were researching as they had taken steps to cover their tracks by grabbing as many books on different subjects as they could. The older eagles had attempted to figure it out by offering their help but they had all been denied, even Lisa's older sister.

All they knew was that it had started with - who else - Lisa and Terry. They had walked into the common room one day with fire in their eyes and gathered all the other first years up and were gone. When they returned that same fire had spread to the others, sparking interest and worry in the other students.

The Gryffindor first years - bar Hermione Granger and Ron Weasley - made daily trips out to see Hagrid, where they stayed for hours on end if allowed, talking about Merlin knows what. A few had
tried to pump Hagrid for information but it seemed that for once the half-giant had learned to keep a secret. That along with the fact that Parvati Patil and Lavender Brown willingly sat in the dirt was nearly enough to give Minerva a heart attack.

Neville had been the ringleader on this front, making everyone certain that Romanoff was somehow behind it all. Hermione had attempted to find out what was happening but was brushed off by Dean - who told her that if they needed her help they would ask. No one wondered why Ron was excluded.

Some of the Hufflepuff first years - Wayne Hopkins, Susan Bones, Hannah Abbot and Sally-Anne Perks - were seen several times whispering to one another in corners, scaring those who knew that when the badgers gathered together like that it meant something big.

The only Slytherin in the know - Hadrian Romanoff because he seemed to be involved in everything these days - disappeared at odd times and returned with a triumphant grin.

Sometimes he and Peeves would be seen coming out of the same room together, shake hands, and part ways. His housemates had tried to figure out what was going on but none of them had any luck, which only served to heighten the worry.

The staff was at a loss. None of them could remember a time during their tenure as both teacher and student when the houses banded together like this, let alone only first years. Only Sprout seemed to have any idea of what was going on but she was tight lipped and seemed to be quite proud and pleased with the students. Not even the headmaster asking her plainly got her to reveal her secret.

It was making the others anxious and no one had any clue as what to do about it. Bribing, scolding, questioning, even straight out threatening, none of it worked. If anything it made the children's resolve even stronger.

"We're not doing anything bad so butt out!" Lavender had said boldly when Percy Weasley attempted to question her.

"And even if we were why would you think we would rat ourselves out just because you asked?" Padma had added, her arms crossed over her chest as she backed up her sister's best friend.

One event sent terror into the hearts of everyone. Argus Filch either stumbled upon the secret or was deliberately brought it in and he was keeping it to himself. The older students were sure that he had been bribed somehow but since none of them had ever been successful in doing so they weren't sure with what. To know that the infamous Argus Filch and Peeves the Poltergeist were in agreement on something and were actively keeping it from everyone had actually made a second year Hufflepuff cry when he saw them discussing something.

"Kids ain't always so bad, y'know," Argus had grumbled when confronted, staring off through a window, his hand absently stroking Mrs. Norris' fur. "We all wan' a place here, som'where, an'where. I'm just helpin' them find theirs."

It all came to a head one night - something that was only noticed because of the obvious anxiousness on the faces of the first years - and then passed without a sound.

Nothing was set on fire, no one was brought back from the dead. There were no great parties or feasts. Woodland creatures weren't spotted dancing in the Forbidden Forest, Filch wasn't suddenly able to use magic, Peeves didn't ascend to a higher plane to become a chaos god.

Snape wasn't turned into a toad, Binns wasn't exorcised, Flitwick didn't grow overnight. The school brooms weren't mysteriously replaced with newer models, the Hogwarts house elves weren't all
f Freed, the dungeons weren't remodeled to allow for better heating. None of the possibilities the students and staff had thought up came to life - though the broom one did inspire Susan Bones and Hannah Abbot.

One night and it was over. Nobody was sure whether or not they were happy to not know what happened.

Vincent Crabbe would later swear that he heard the howl of a wolf.

Narcissa watched dispassionately as her husband worked himself up into a tizzy.

The news that the Black headship would not be passed down to their son had infuriated Lucius. While the Malfoys were influential and considered one of the richest magical families in Britain, they couldn't hold a candle to that of the Blacks. Lucius had been operating under the impression that since Draco was the son of a born Black he would have right to the lordship of the family.

Walburga Black had after all disowned her eldest - quite publicly at that - and her other son was long since declared dead. Draco should have the best chance at being the Black heir but it was not to be.

Narcissa had looked into it at her husband's urging and found that not only had her cousin not actually been disowned, he had named an heir as well as striking Bellatrix from the family and adding her disgraced sister and her daughter to the family line. Draco now came in second to the unknown heir, third should Nymphadora have a son before Draco reached his majority.

While her husband focused on the loss of the Black fortune and power Narcissa turned her attention to who had been named heir Black. She was sure that her cousin would name no other than his own children or that of his brother in arms James Potter. As there hadn't been any announcement of Lord Black welcoming a child - something she would have automatically received as she hadn't been disowned along with her deranged sister - she knew that it had to be the missing Harry Potter.

She kept this to herself, however, not seeing any reason to subject herself to her husband's ranting on that 'disgraceful son of a mudblood' once again ruining things. Honestly, placing so much responsibility on the shoulders of a babe, it had absolutely no decorum. If only her husband could admit he had lost and move on then perhaps he would see he didn't need to hold himself back by continually bribing the minister. It did nothing for him except keep laws and legislations from passing; he hadn't been able to push his own through and the power of the minister was waning with each vote.

Narcissa saw the thin silver lining in her husband being so focused on yet another loss - he at least was no longer trying to discredit the family of the boy who had humiliated her Draco in front of their Slytherin peers. It was embarrassing, yes, to know that their doted upon son had lost to another first year - a muggleborn at that - but trying to exact revenge against the family would only show that the Malfoys were sore losers and prove the boy right on the matter of Draco clinging to the reputation of his father. It wouldn't have happened in the first place if Lucius hadn't looked into the family at Draco's urging.

Once the school year was over Narcissa planned on taking Draco on a month long trip with her in order to properly educate him on how to act as heir Malfoy, a Slytherin legacy and - most importantly - the son of Narcissa Malfoy neé Black. She wouldn't tolerate any more embarrassment brought on by her husband and son's shared arrogance.

He would need to learn how to treat those that were unknown so that he wouldn't end up insulting someone of a higher station than his and how to act even once he learned he was higher up than who
he was speaking with. No need to insult potential allies because of childish pride. There was also the
matter of speaking so freely of his opinions on those not born into magical families. He would need
to learn how to speak without saying or even those who agreed with him wouldn't back him - public
opinion held a lot of weight in certain areas after all.

His grades would need to be addressed as well. Outstandings in just one class - one taught by his
godfather no less - were not acceptable in any form. She held no hopes for History as it was
notorious for boring even the most studious of Ravenclaws but he would start pulling up his grades
in Transfiguration, Charms, Herbology and Astronomy until he was receiving consistent Exceeds
Expectations at the very least. Narcissa refused to have to hold her tongue during tea while the other
mothers boasted about their children's grades and accomplishments. Both she and his father had been
top students and she expected him to follow in their footsteps as such.

Perhaps one day she would deem him able to learn that he had been defeated by Harry Potter but that
day was a long way off.

For now she turned her attention back to her still ranting husband.

Mundane by Herbert Rockefeller.

"What exactly is this? What's magic born mean?"

"You've been told the basics of the magical world, right?" Bruce started patiently. He waited for
Steve to nod his head before continuing. "Well, in some parts of the world there are magical
communities that are very insular, so much so that they don't know much about the 'mundane' world
past the time when the two worlds weren't separated. Books like these were written to help those
born in those sorts of magical communities have a basic understanding of the rest of the world. Some
go into more depth about one subject or other, but this one is pretty general. It explains major world
history, social and technological developments, the like."

A look of understanding crossed Steve's face. "You think this will help me learn a lot of what I've
missed."

"Exactly. Once you've studied this and gotten more time to get used to all the changes around you
we can go into more detail about whatever you feel you need to know." Bruce explained.

"I asked, uh, JARVIS? If he could do that search thing for any classes I could take. He said
something about community classes and trade schools?" Steve hated how hopelessly confused he
sounded but at least he had a legitimate reason. Though he could do without Howard's son calling
him a confused old man all the time.

Bruce smiled widely. "Yeah, that's perfect. You should probably wait until you won't be completely
out of your depth if someone tries to talk to you but it's a great idea. It'll help you to socialize with
people who aren't as... eccentric... as we are."

"That's one word for it," Steve grinned. He wished the old crew could meet these guys, especially
Bucky. He would've had a heart attack at seeing what Howard's son had been able to do.

The grin fell from Steve's face as grief tore through him, something that had been happening to him
frequently since he was taken out of the ice. He knew that Bruce noticed but the other man didn't say
anything for which he was grateful. He didn't want to be coddled all the time and it seemed that the
Avengers and the Director were the only ones who agreed with him. Once he got his feet on the
ground he would be fine. He was sure of it.

Steve cleared his throat. "So, Hadrian's part of this magical world?" He had heard a lot about the little guy but had yet to meet him. By the time Steve was deemed ready to leave SHIELD headquarters Hadrian had already returned to his school. A school for magic, apparently, something that Steve had scarcely believed at first.

"Yeah. His birth mother was born to non-magicals but his father was born in an incredibly insular magical community in Britain. They attended the same school Hadrian currently goes to and both graduated with the equivalent of honors. Hadrian was offered a chance to go and decided to take it and he's made some pretty good friends already." Bruce looked happy to talk about the boy, something which made Steve want to smile. "He's a top student in most of his classes and even started a defense study group when he got fed up with the incompetency of their defense teacher. Call themselves the Knights of Loki."

"Bet that didn't affect the man's ego at all,"

Bruce smirked. "Of course not. Loki isn't one to boast of his accomplishments or revel in others' admiration of him."

Steve let out a short, loud laugh. "I'm starting to think that the Starks just might be descendants of that man. It would explain a lot."

"I agree, we should look into it." Steve managed to keep himself from jumping into a defensive position at the new voice but still tensed up and clenched his fists. Clint didn't comment on it, only jumped into an empty chair at the table. "What's up, doc?"

Steve was glad to note that he understood the reference and to know that something from his time was apparently still relevant.

"Steve and I are discussing his present time rehabilitation." Bruce answered.

"Yeah, yeah, cool. Mind if I borrow the good captain?" Clint asked. Steve saw a familiar glint of mischief and knew that he was going to be in for a ride. He couldn't wait.

He was going to hit the ground running and wouldn't stop until he couldn't breathe.

Clint rocked on the back of his heels, a grin threatening to overtake his face.

"You want me to help with what?" Steve asked disbelievingly.

"Well, we know that Dumbledore's sniffing around the Potter accounts so we've decided to mess with his head a little. Loki and Natasha gave me some money to use however I want so long as the purchases trace back to the Potter accounts," Clint explained. "Our plan is to buy completely unrelated things from all over to keep him running around in circles trying to figure exactly where we are and why the hell we're buying what we're buying."

"How does that relate to buying ducks?"

"Dunno. Just always wanted my own ducks and figured this would be perfect. Maybe the old goat will think we're using the ducks in some kind of dark magic sacrifice."

Steve nodded slowly. "Could we perhaps buy one of those little water slides for them?"
Clint's grin grew disturbingly. He clapped Steve on the shoulder. "You're gonna do just fine here, Steve-o."

Hadrian removed the Silencing Charm from his bed curtains and sat patiently waiting for any sign that his roommates were still awake.

Once he was sure that the other boys were sound asleep - in the case of Blaise not so soundly - he quietly slipped out of his bed and crept out of the room. At the end of the hall he listened for any older students who might be out of their rooms.

Just as he was about to move forward he heard the sound of a chair scraping against the floor. With a muttered Russian curse Hadrian flattened his body against the wall, thankful for the low lighting that was common in the dungeons. Several tense seconds later - and debating on whether or not to use his wand to hide himself - he moved forward slowly, his ears searching for anything.

At the corner of the entrance to the common room Hadrian pulled out his mirror and slid it across the floor until it was just in the room then he tilted it slightly, searching for whoever was in the room so late.

With a bit of maneuvering he managed to catch a glimpse of Colin Bradley, a fourth year with a strange knack for time spells, curled up in a chair and reading a large leather bound book. And just Hadrian's luck he was facing directly toward the door.

Hadrian counted to ten in his head before taking a deep breath, taking the time to think over his next plan of action. He silently crept back a few feet before slowly standing up and walking back to his room.

He quickly grabbed a few galleons from his rune protected piggy bank and made his way back out to the common room. Then he remembered the map and turned back to grab it as well.

Casually strolling into the common room, Hadrian held up the money to let Colin see before tossing them toward the older boy. Colin caught them easily and nodded his silent agreement. Hadrian returned the nod, continuing on his way out of the Slytherin dorms.

Once the door shut behind him Hadrian let out a sigh of relief before casting an enchantment he learned from Remus would hide him from view of the portraits - he had to be careful, though, as it wouldn't block any sound he made.

Hadrian stood outside the door to McGonagall's office, his wand ready at his side. The trek to his destination had thankfully gone without a hitch - he knew about the forty minute lapse between the last of the teacher and prefect patrols and the beginning of the ghost patrols and had planned accordingly.

Now all he had to do was break into the Deputy Headmistress' office without alerting anyone and find what he needed without leaving any evidence.

"Easy peasy Hulk-y squeezy."

After checking the map to make sure McGonagall wasn't having a late night in her office Hadrian set the tip of his wand against the very middle of the door. Concentrating on the feel of Loki's magic - something he was very well used to - he called for it. The remnants left behind from Loki's brief visit to the office recognized the call and following the command left to it dissolved the alert wards placed on the entrance to the entrance.
Hadrian held his concentration until he felt the last of the magic fade and heard the door click open. With a quick glance around he swung the door open and stepped inside, letting it shut behind him a little too loudly.

He made his way straight to the file cabinet. Luckily for him it only took a simple unlocking charm to open it. He opened and shut all the drawers, searching for the one he needed. He was briefly tempted to look into some of the student files but managed to refrain himself. For the moment at least.

Near the bottom he found where she kept the files on school incidents - the drawer with the strongest length enhancing charm so far - and he started rifling through them for what he needed. He found folders for the troll incident, reports on when the Cerberus was brought into the castle and other things that were apparently being guarded by the demon dog, something about a break in to the Ravenclaw dorms. One of the folders was simply marked as 'Marauders-Weasley' and was easily one of the thickest in the drawer. Hadrian grabbed that one as well.

He laid all the files out on the professor's desk and set to making copies as well as recording a video of them with his mirror and saving it as a message to his mother. Once he was finished and started putting them back another one caught his eye - he made a copy of it to look over later, too, before shutting the drawer shut and re-locking it.

He looked around the office, checking that there was no sign he had been there, before re-applying the enchantment and leaving.

And if he hummed the Mission Impossible theme on the way back then so be it.

"...and seriously, parchment? Come on. I feel like I should be reading the Declaration of Independence," Tony complained.

Sitting next to him Natasha could feel when Clint rolled his eyes at the genius' dramatics. In front of them on one of Tony's holographic screens were photo stills of the video of the files Hadrian sent to Natasha's mirror.

Professor McGonagall had written out detailed recounts of each incident - even explaining in neat detail about the traps laid out under Cerberus hidden in the third floor. The troll attack had the least written in it and Natasha was almost sure that it was because the Slytherins had been tight lipped around the Gryffindor Deputy Headmistress rather than because she didn't care to learn all she could. At least she should hope so or Natasha would have problem with the witch.

"If she wrote down all this and filed it then why wouldn't she just send it to the ministry?" Bruce asked.

"Two options. This Dumbledore told her he would do it himself and she just thinks he managed to keep it from reaching the general public or she believes that since both matters were or are being dealt with then it should stay as an in school matter," Steve suggested, staring intently at the photos. He still couldn't quite believe that things had changed so much since he had gone in the ice but he was glad to see Howard's legacy going strong.

Natasha inclined her head slightly in agreement.

"Either way it hasn't gotten out except through all the rumors we spread and the letters we think the students sent out. Can we use these to get the word out?" Clint asked.

Remus shifted in his seat uncomfortably- Moony was getting a bit restless with the upcoming full moon. "We could use these for proof. Send them in anonymously or something but then Professor
McGonagall and Dumbledore and the other teachers will start looking for whoever broke into her office."

That Slytherin would be the first place they looked went unsaid. Even if a Slytherin did do it.

"Or we could hold onto these as leverage. If they try to push back against the rumors and try to disprove them then we have proof right at our fingertips," Tony added. They all turned to Natasha.

"Leave it for now. If we need them we'll use them until then we'll continue using the gossip method. What we need to focus on now are the traps for whatever Dumbledore's trying to protect," she declared. The others nodded. Tony swiped the other photos away and enlarged the ones of the third floor trap file.

"Well, if McGonagall knows what they're protecting then she kept it out of her records. And I don't see her going along with this without knowing," Sirius said.

"So our next move should be figuring out what's so important that the teachers were willing to endanger the students," Bruce said.

"Aye. As well as aiding in their protection," Thor added grandly.

"Yeah, I mean if Bright Eyes and his friends could get in no problem then all it's gonna take is some older student daring a friend to check it out and then we'll have a tragedy on our hands," Clint said.

Natasha leaned forward to rest her elbows on the table. "We break into the school and upgrade the so called traps. At the very least make it so that none of the students can get into the room."

"What happens when we find out what they're protecting?" Remus asked.

"I say we cross that bridge when we get to it. If it turns out it makes some sort of sense to keep in the school then we just make sure both it and the students stay safe," Tony said. "If it would obviously be better off somewhere else then we take matters into our own hands."

"Agreed," Steve said. Tony sent him a look out of the side of his eye but didn't say anything. Steve sighed. He didn't understand why Howard's son seemed to hate him but he hoped to figure it out sooner or later.

With a wave of his hand Tony closed the holographic screen. "What's Houdini's next plan of action? Is he on standby or whatever you call it or do we want him to keep snooping around?"

Again they all turned to Natasha. "As long as he stays covert I'll allow him to keep searching for anything wrong or strange. But as soon as it seems like someone suspects him I want him to lay low."

"And if he gets caught then we bring him home. His safety is more important than the mission."

The following week at Hogwarts nearly everyone was confused about the song all the portraits were humming.

They were even more confused when a fourth year Ravenclaw with short cropped dark hair, a maddeningly pearly smile and blessed with a short stature attempted to lower himself from the ceiling.
"Hadrian!"

Hadrian moved just out of the way, letting Terry squeeze into the armchair next to him. "What's up?"

"We need to do something for Lisa's birthday next week."

Hadrian's eyes widened. "Her birthday is next week? Since when?"

"I'm going to guess since she was born but I could be wrong," Terry rolled his eyes. "How did you forget? Leanne and her were talking about it last month."

"They were?" Hadrian almost shouted.

Terry leaned in close to his friend's face, his eyes narrowed. "You don't really pay attention to special announcements, do you? First Dumbledore's warning about the third floor corridor and now Lisa's birthday. Hey! Do you know when my birthday is?"

"Not next week," Hadrian hedged.

"It's in April. So you have a whole month to forget. Wayne's is in July, by the way."

"Oh, so are mine and Neville's," Hadrian said happily.

"At least we know who like the most, huh?" Terry teased, throwing his arm around Hadrian's shoulders. "But anyway, I was thinking we could throw a little surprise party for our dear Lisa and you could sneak her family into the castle."

Hadrian glowered at the Ravenclaw. "And have all the questions start up again. No, thanks, I'm good." Even as he spoke an idea started forming in Hadrian's mind. He would need Tony's help but he didn't think the man would mind too much.

"Yeah, yeah, I know that look so go ahead and do whatever you're going to do but make sure I get credit," Terry said. "Neville and Wayne have something going on so they won't be able to help with the party but they said they were gonna get her presents. Neville said something about a broach and I think Wayne's gonna get her something muggle."

"And you already blew your monthly allowance so this party and whatever I do is gonna be her gift from you," Hadrian added.

Terry nodded, unrepentant.

Hadrian sighed. "We can use my training room so we don't interfere with the defense club and we can ask the house elves to cater and decorate."

"They'll love that."
"And then we can just let a few people know about it. Us, obviously, Neville and Wayne. Dean and Seamus. I guess all the first year Ravenclaws and Leanne."

Terry looked thoughtful. "Hagrid might enjoy coming. We can just tell him not to bring any food."

"That should be fine, right? And if anyone gets upset about not being invited we can just invite them to yours next month."

"Perfect. Now that that's all done," Terry shifted and leaned into Hadrian's side, resting his head on his shoulder. "What're you reading?"

"I'm studying for the tests to move up a grade at my old school," Hadrian explained. He rolled his shoulder a little until Terry got the hint and moved his chin so it wasn't digging into him.

Terry hummed. "Oh, yeah, your mum wants you to keep up with them. When you're done can I take a look at it?"

"Sure, but don't you have that research essay to finish? About spellcrafting?"

"I gave it to Professor Babbling to look over the part on how runes play a part in it. After that I just have to revise it then seal it and hand it in for review."

"Cool," Hadrian nodded. "Hey, how mad do you think Lisa would be if we gave her a book full of typos and grammar mistakes?"

"I like the way you think."
Neville crawled out from under the table in the greenhouse and walked over to one of the shelves and pulled a potted plant off of it.

"This is a lavender plant grown from seeds taken from the grounds of a unicorn den. They're supposed to have added benefits to regular lavender, like helping with sleep and meditation," Neville said as he handed the softly glowing flower over to his friend. "I know you have a stronger sense of smell so I thought it would work really for you without having to use it in a potion or anything."

Wayne accepted the gift gratefully. "Thanks, Neville." He was quiet for a moment, trying to think of some way to repay his friend in some way.

"You wanna know where the kitchens are?"

Steve held his hand up to his forehead to block the Egyptian sun from shining into his eyes. He thought about asking to borrow the extra pair of sunglasses he knew Clint had on him but before he could say anything there was a loud cracking sound and his instincts were telling him someone was behind him.

He whirled around, just barely managing not to fall into an obvious defensive stance.

"Fancy seeing you here," Sirius teased.

"And with you looking like you're looking," Clint flirted back easily.

Remus sent Steve a look of amused exasperation. Steve found himself returning it without realizing.

"What brings you two here?" Remus asked.

Clint grinned - just this side of malicious. "Thinking about getting Bright Eyes a souvenir. Maybe he could show it to his headmaster."

"Well, in that case, there's this magical little place a few miles from here. It's filled with all sorts of things the headmaster would be interested in," Remus said casually. Sirius' eyes lit up in glee.

"Could you take us there? We might need an... expert opinion on what would catch the headmaster's intrigue the most," Clint suggested.

Sirius laughed loudly. "We might be able to help you with that."

"As an added bonus we can also show you what will make Flitwick flip his wig," Remus added.

"Why waste any more time? Let's go." Clint nodded in the direction of the agent trailing them and received one in return. Then he gestured for Sirius and Remus to lead the way.

Most of the first and second years had decided to take advantage of the warming days and were out by the lake. Some of them were studying - making use of the charm to keep their things from flying away that Terry taught them - some of them were playing games, others were wading in the lake and trying to entice Marvin to come towards them.

Neville and Lisa were among the ones in the water, the legs of their pants rolled up almost to their knees. Terry was playing a game of dominoes with three second years and absolutely dominating them despite having just learned the game half an hour before.

About twenty yards from them Dean, Seamus, Su and Justin were trying to start up a game of footie.
They'd managed to convince Lily and Millicent to try playing and were hoping to get at least two more players. Ron was asking a dozen questions a minute about the differences between the non-magical game and Quidditch but seemed surprisingly interested in playing. Cormac was standing off to the side a little, obviously listening in but not saying anything just yet.

Lavender was trying her best to sunbathe without being out of uniform while Parvati and Padma caught up with each other in Hindi.

A shriek from Hannah disrupted the easy going atmosphere for a moment until they all realized it was only because Marvin had splashed her, soaking her from head to toe.

Wayne and Hadrian were laying next to each other on the grass, gazing at the clouds. They were both enjoying having a chance to just lay back and relax - Wayne especially was content with laying in the grass.

"Hey! We're about to start playing and we don't know how to keep the ball from going out of range so be careful!" Dean shouted. The students yelled back their acknowledgement, most of them without looking away from what they were doing.

"Why aren't you playing?" Wayne asked, moving to lean back on his arms.

"Believe it or not I kinda suck at soccer. Took ballet for a while and everything - I still trip over my own feet when I play," Hadrian confessed.

"I'll believe it when I see it."

"Well, that's never gonna happen so I guess I'm just gonna be a liar in your eyes."

Wayne rolled his eyes.

"What about you? Why aren't you playing?"

Wayne shrugged - a bit awkwardly because of his position. "Not really into it, I guess."

"If you say so, Wolfman."

"Shut up."

Hadrian smiled. "Make me-" He was cut off by his mirror vibrating in his pants pocket. Wayne looked confused by the buzzing sound.

"I have to go check on... something," Hadrian said lamely.

Wayne didn't say anything, just stared at his friend blankly until Hadrian grinned sheepishly and stood up. Wayne laid back down fully, raising his arm briefly in a half hearted wave.

Hadrian started walking back to the castle. He stopped to call out to Terry to tell him that he was heading inside.

"Alright. See you later. Tell your mom I said hi," Terry shouted back.

Hadrian narrowed his eyes at him but left it alone - Terry was weird.

Once he was inside the castle and out of sight from anyone Hadrian pulled his mirror out of his pocket. On the screen was a notification telling him his Uncle Sirius had left him a video message. Hadrian clicked on it.
Sirius’ widely grinning face filled the mirror. "Hey, pup, how's tricks? I'm having fun myself, though you should really take better care of your workout equipment."

It took Hadrian a moment to make the connection but the second he did he was off running.

He burst into his training room and was immediately grabbed up by a just as excited Thor.

"Young Hadrian!" Thor exclaimed as he spun the boy around in a crushing hug.

"Uncle Thor!"

Hadrian felt himself being lifted out of Thor's large arms. He floated through the air before falling to Remus' open arms. The deceptively strong wizard caught him easily and brought into a hug almost as tight as Thor's.

"Oh, cub, I've missed you," Remus muttered into Hadrian's hair.

Hadrian laughed. "You just saw me at New Year's."

"I know," Remus said as he pulled back a little to look his godson in the eye. "But I guess I've been spoiled always having you around."

"Yeah, I don't think I could handle another six years of this," came Sirius voice as he stepped up behind Hadrian and wrapped his arms around both the eleven year old and Remus.

"Don't know about you but I say we send Houdini back here as soon as he hits puberty so we don't have to deal with all that."

Hadrian wriggled out of his godfathers' grasp and turned to face the genius. "I missed you, too, Uncle Tony," he said as he hugged the man around the waist. Tony didn't respond but held onto Hadrian tightly.

Then Hadrian was pulled away from him by an enthusiastic Darcy. "Oh, Ri-Ri! It's been so long since I've seen your cute little face! I just wanna pinch your cheeks and squeeze you until you can't breathe!"

"You're already... there, auntie," Hadrian wheezed out.

"Darcy, let the boy go before he passes out," Pepper ordered with a shake of her head.

"Yeah, he's in Slytherin. He shouldn't be blue like that," Sirius commented, earning a jab in the stomach from Remus' elbow.

Somehow Hadrian managed to escape Darcy's embrace and ran to Pepper, who bent over to be able to hug him properly.

"It's wonderful to see you, Hadrian," Pepper said sweetly. She kissed him on his forehead then wiped away the slight stain her lipstick left.

"My turn!" The shout was all the warning Hadrian had before he was snatched up by Clint. Soon he had been squeezed half to death by everyone and had a very noticeable lipstick stain on his forehead courtesy of - well, he wasn't exactly sure who and that only sort of worried him.

"What are you guys doing here? How come you didn't tell me? Where's Uncle Loki?" Hadrian asked in quick succession once he felt like he could speak without his ribs breaking.
Natasha ruffled her son's hair. "We did make plans for family days that never happened so we decided to surprise you when we all had the time."

"And my brother has dealings with ones he was unwilling to say," Thor answered.

"Who cares? Let's party!" Darcy shouted, a bottle of wine appearing in her hands.

Tony clapped his hands together. "Yes! Alright. Brucie made the food and Supercuts has them packed away somewhere."

"Please tell me you made your curry pizza?" Bruce nodded. "Awesome!" Hadrian pumped his fist into the air.

While the others began on setting out the food and moving things around for everyone to sit Remus stepped outside briefly to place a modified Notice-Me-Not charm the Marauders developed in their younger years. It was one of Peter's contributions but Remus figured as long as he used it to keep Hadrian and Sirius happy and safe it was perfectly spiteful.

Hadrian was pulled into his mother's lap. He just adjusted so that he could sit more comfortably without being poked by the knife she kept hidden in her jacket. Bruce handed him a paper plate piled high with curry pizza and mozzarella sticks.

"Ooh, gooey," Hadrian said as he pulled one apart and the warm cheese spread several inches without breaking. "Can you believe these magical things aren't served here?"

Remus chuckled. "Perhaps you could give the elves some recipes for them to use," he suggested. "Your father did that when Lily complained about the lack of lava cakes and I, for one, have been ever thankful for his attempts at impressing her."

"I'll do that. They don't even have chocolate milk. It's a disgrace!"

"True but we don't have treacle tart at home and look at you now," Natasha teased, poking her son in the side.

"Point," Hadrian conceded.

"How are you side lessons coming along?" Pepper asked.

"Eh," Hadrian shrugged. "The defense club was a bigger hit than I thought and between that and spending time with my friends, both of my homeworks and all the surprise catastrophes I haven't had a lot of free time for my music or anything."

"As long as you keep up with your studies and your physical training the lapse in musical study is fine," Pepper said. "Though I'm sure you could find a way to work your guitar practice in with spending time with your friends," she added with a bit of command.

Hadrian smiled to refrain from rolling his eyes. "You got it, Auntie Pepper."

"Hey, pup, guess what Remus did." Sirius jumped out of the way of Remus shooting a silencing spell at him.

"Did it involve Uncle Bruce, chocolate and or an exploding toaster?" Hadrian leaned forward eagerly, getting pizza sauce on his shirt.

"Yes."
They were packing up after the end of Knights of Loki meeting when Parvati approached them with Padma and Lavender flanking her.

"What's up, Parv?" Terry asked.

"We were wondering if you had anything special planned for pre-exams?" Parvati said with a glance at her sister and best friend.

Terry took a moment to think. "Other than cramming? No, not really. Why?"

"I was thinking we could all have a sort of sleep over cram session."

"Something to help everyone relax and still prepare, you know?" Lavender added.

"It's common knowledge that studying in a relaxing environment has a positive impact of memory and lowers stress that could disrupt with both the studying and the actual exam taking," Padma put in. "As well being well fed with good sugars and proteins and getting a restful night of sleep."

Terry stared at the three girls for a moment then turned to look at his friends who were all looking at him in amusement. He turned back to the trio and shrugged. "Sure. But you guys have to set it up, we're all swamped."

Parvati and Lavender let out loud squeals and jumped Terry with surprisingly strong hugs. Padma watched with a grin.

"You won't regret this, Ter! I promise!" Parvati exclaimed before grabbing Lavender and Padma's hands and dragging them away.

Terry shook his head in disbelief.

Lavender Brown sat cross legged next to her best friend Parvati Patil on the padded floor of one of the Knights of Loki training rooms. Each of the years had separated and taken over one of the many rooms that the defense club had claimed as their own.

The plan was to have a cram session and sleep over to ready themselves for the exams. The fifth and seventh years were noticeably the most nervous about it all - considering they were taking their OWLs and NEWTs - but nearly everyone was a bit anxious.

Lavender was thankful that Parvati’s sister had managed to convince them to join one of the study groups and eventually the defense club because she knew that without it she wouldn't be as prepared as she was. Plus it kept her and Parvati in the know about a lot of things.

"I just don't understand why we need to sleep here. Sleeping in the dorms will be just the same." Hermione Granger said, sounding annoyed.

Lavender wanted to roll her eyes. She didn't understand why the bushy haired girl was even there seeing as all she did was question everything and complain that they weren't learning what they needed to. If she didn't want to be there she could just leave.

But she continued to show up for club meetings - though she had yet to join any of the other study groups. Seamus had asked her why and she apparently said that she didn't feel that they were up to her study habits. After seeing how many books Hermione checked out every other day, Lavender had to agree with the girl.
"I thought it would be a good idea to help everybody relax so we don't mess up because we're so freaked or something." Parvati said.

"Padma said that relaxation, being well fed and a good nights sleep help with tests. I mean, that's why there are hammocks and snacks, right?" Lavender picked up, gesturing towards the hammocks, sleeping bags and small tables with a bunch of snacks the house elves had kindly set up for them. She wasn't going to let a Drusilla Downer like Hermione make Parvati feel bad for her idea.

Hermione glanced at what Lavender was talking about and huffed in response.

Lavender and Parvati shared a knowing look but held their tongues. No need to get into a pointless argument with a girl who obviously wanted nothing to do with them.

Deciding to change the subject, Lavender said, "I heard Ron was coming. Apparently his brothers wrote home about his grades and his dad told him that it would be in his best interest to study more."

"No doubt. He should be glad his mom didn't send him a howler about it. Can you imagine how embarrassing that would be?" Parvati giggled.

"Why hasn't he come before?" The two Gryffindors turned to see a blushing Hannah Abbot sitting next to Susan Bones. "Sorry, didn't mean to eavesdrop."

"It's fine," Lavender shrugged. "But apparently Ron didn't want to come because of the Slytherins in the club."

"Which I don't understand," Parvati continued. "There's a lot of tension between the lions and snakes so they're kept pretty separate most of the time. It's not like he has to invite Malfoy over for dinner."

Susan shifted a bit so she was facing the other girls more. "Why doesn't he just come to one of the Gryffindor or Gryffindor-Hufflepuff study groups then?"

"Laziness," Parvati said bluntly. "He's only interested in Quidditch and chess but still gets mad when his grades are so low."

Susan nodded her head in understanding. Her aunt had told her about people like that and how there was an unsettling amount of them working in the Ministry.

"His brother, Percy, has tried to get him to study more but Ron only gets annoyed. Percy's kinda stuffy and all but I think he's just trying to help. I wonder why Percy's not in Ravenclaw, though." Lavender said.

"Family tradition?" Hannah offered. "I don't think there's ever been a born Weasley who wasn't in Gryffindor. Like before Sirius Black there had never been a born Black who wasn't in Slytherin."

"Oh, right! He and James Potter were best friends, right? That's why everyone thought he was the one who betrayed where they were hiding because he would've been the only one to know." Parvati recalled what her father had told her and her sister during one of their lessons. He had said that after the truth had been found out, Sirius Black had disappeared from the British wizarding world and was only heard from when he used his votes in the Wizengamot.

Susan hummed in thought.

"What're you thinking, Susie?" Hannah asked.

"Do you think Sirius knows where Harry Potter is? If he and James Potter were as close as people
said, he would want to take care of the only child James had, wouldn't he?"

Surprise showed on the other girls' faces. None of them had thought of that before, though it did make sense.

"Merlin," Lavender muttered. "James and Lily might've even named him guardian over Harry in his will."

"But why wouldn't he let Harry Potter come to Hogwarts?" Hannah wondered.

"Maybe he wants to make sure he's protected? My mum said that people were worried that the Death Eaters who weren't arrested might try to hurt him for what he did. And that there's been talk that a bunch of the votes in the Black name have started to be used again. I don't which laws or whatever he's voting for or against, though." Parvati said.

"I heard from my aunt that she's writing up a new legislation that will call for the school wards to be updated every year or so." Susan confessed. "She said that the headmaster wasn't able to tell them how a troll got in despite them being notoriously stupid."

Lavender blinked at that. She hadn't heard anything about the wards being questioned but she supposed it made sense. "When I wrote home to my parents about what happened my mom said she was going to send a Howler to the headmaster. I doubt she went through with it, but it's the thought."

Hannah shivered. "I can't imagine anyone sending Professor Dumbledore a Howler."

Whatever was going to be said in response was interrupted when the door opened and Hadrian Romanoff with Wayne Hopkins and Neville Longbottom in tow. The boys acted as if they didn't notice the silence that followed their arrival, or if they did, they didn't care.

Neville said something to his friends, too low for anyone else to hear, that seemed to be the end of whatever conversation they had been having. Hadrian faced the other first years and clasped his hands together. "Alright, first things first, is everyone here? Besides Lisa and Terry," he added.

Hermione raised her hand but only waited until eyes were on her before answering. "Ronald was said to be coming tonight, though I don't know if he's changed his mind."

"Has anyone seen him?" Hadrian asked. Lavender saw that his nose had scrunched up a little at the information.

"Last I saw him was in the common room before I left." Seamus spoke up.

Hadrian looked over them. "I don't suppose anyone here fancies going to get him while we wait for Lisa and Terry?"

Nobody - not even Hermione who had taken to nagging the boy about studying and doing his homework - volunteered.

Hadrian sighed, muttered something about a sell fone and someone named Jarvis that Lavender didn't understand, and turned to face Wayne and Hopkins, his hands held up at his chest. Lavender didn't get what he was doing but the other two did as well as Hermione if her huffing was any indication.

"Rock! Paper! Scissors! Shoot!" The three boys chanted together before throwing out one of their hands. Hadrian's had been clenched into a fist while both Wayne and Neville held out two fingers.
"Sweet! Battle it out, guys."

Neville rolled his eyes but he and Wayne did the strange chanting again, this time with Wayne holding his hand out flat and Neville making a fist.

"Darn," Neville sighed. "I'll be right back."

After the door shut closed behind Neville, Hadrian turned back to the others. "So, what should we do in the meantime?"

Anthony Goldstein raised his hand and waited until Hadrian pointed a finger in his direction. "We could write out the plan for the night on one of the blackboards. I don't really know how these things go but wouldn't it be best to break it into groups and have each of them focus on a subject for a period of time? That way the ones who need help in that area can get what they need and when the time is up, they can move on to another subject or stay with the same one as needed. No one will have to sit through a review they don't really need."

"I volunteer Anthony Goldstein as Captain of the Joint Study Alliance and elect him to be in charge in designations," Hadrian called out. "All those in favor, say 'aye.'"

Lavender smiled at the flush on Anthony's face when everyone voted for him to be... whatever it is that Hadrian called him.

Anthony stood up and walked towards one of the blackboards and started to work on breaking them up into smaller groups and setting a timeline. Wayne had moved to stand closer to him to watch him work, but still an arms length away. Not even having practically everyone in their year know about his furry secret had helped him to open up to anyone not part of Hadrian's group or Dean Thomas.

Lavender was glad that he had at least a few people to talk to - knowing it could be a lot worse - but she sort of wished he could be as outgoing as Hadrian or Seamus or Terry. He seemed much more thoughtful than most of the boys and was definitely one of the cutest boys of the first and second years. What a shame.

Lavender hadn't realized how long she had spent gazing at the quiet Hufflepuff until she heard Ron shouting about not being put in the same group as a slimy snake.

She shared a look with Parvati and rolled her eyes.

Just months ago if you had told Amelia Bones, Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, the first woman to hold the title since its inception, that she would be willingly working with Narcissa Malfoy to protect their families she would have laughed in your face, Stunned you, and called for a Mind Healer.

But here she was, sitting her in office going over the draft they had written up with Lady Malfoy sitting across from her.

She could admit, however, that Narcissa was one of her best options for this particular endeavor. Amelia alone could have possibly gotten the legislation passed but she didn't want to leave it the goodwill of her political opponents who might vote against it despite agreeing with her for the sake of their pride.

With practically anything else she wouldn't have taken such measures but this was for the protection her niece and the other students of Hogwarts Witchcraft and Wizardry. She would be damned before she let this fall through her hands because of pettiness.
"Has Dumbledore made any statement regarding the worry about the wards?"

Amelia hummed. "Not as of yet. I doubt he hasn't had it brought to his attention so his lack of response is puzzling."

"Perhaps he believes that his silence will be taken as denial to the questioned state of the wards." Narcissa mused.

"Perhaps," Amelia didn't quite believe that, suspecting else was at play that kept the wizard's attention away from the issue of the school wards. She would let it be for now as it worked in her favor, though once the legislation was passed she would look into it if only to be sure it wasn't another security risk.

Before any of that could happen she had to finish writing her summation while pretending she didn't notice her partner make a few inquiries with her coworkers.

Hadrian took in a deep breath, trying to ignore the way Lily was clutching his arm so tightly that she was very close to cutting off his circulation.

"Lily, it's going to go fine. You passed the practice exam with a double-E and know what you got wrong. You're not going to mess up," he reassured in a low voice.

"Of course I'm not," Lily whispered harshly. "What about Millie?"

"Millie's smarter than you," Hadrian said plainly. Lily's grip on him relaxed slightly at the blunt words.

Lily took a few moments to regain herself. "Thank you, Hadrian."

"No problem. I'd rather deal with you than Lisa and Terry hyping each other up," Hadrian said with an exaggerated full body shiver, getting a giggle out of the blonde.

"Surely they can't be worse than Granger."

"Dunno. I haven't seen her since the sleep over."

Lily hummed thoughtfully. "Me neither but galleon says she's had her nose in a book."

"I have this strange habit of not taking a sucker's bet," Hadrian said with a grin.

"Your mum must be so proud."

"Hope so. She's the one who drilled it into me."

Lily laughed. "Mummy's boy."

"Spoiled brat."

"Speaking in the third person is unbecoming, Romanoff," Lily said with a sniff.

"Who was credited with the creation of the cheering charm?"

"Imsodel Havenhart. She was believed to have created it as a way to help her several children cope with their father's absence."
"Correct. Who was later discovered to be the true creator?"

"Carrown Havenhart, Imsodel's husband. He actually hated that his profession as a collector of stolen heirlooms and relics required him to be apart from his family so he created the spell to simulate his embrace. Imsodel was given credit because it was thought to be something only a mother would do, though it's rumored she and Carrown laughed over the mistake."

"Correct. Plus five points for the additional info."

"Yes!" Lisa pumped her fist into the air.

Terry shook his head at her. "Yeah, yeah. Now it's my turn.

Lisa's face cleared and she shifted. "Alright. Describe the difference between the confounding charm and the persuasion charm..."

Neville tried to make himself look smaller, hoping to keep any notice off of him. The fifth and seventh year Gryffindors - led by a pink faced Percy - were driving everyone up the walls with their last minute panic.

The twins and Lee's attempts at levity were met with stunners and silencers by the mass.

"Where the hell is my quill!"

"It's in your hand, you dolt!"

"Who are you calling a dolt, you bint!"

"You, arsehole!"

"Suck it 'til next Tuesday, Chalmers!"

Neville had to duck out of the way when Gracelyn Chalmers threw an overpowered jinx at Killian Murphy and missed him by a wide margin. The jinx ended up smashing harmlessly into the wall.

Neville decided that that was the time to leave.

Wayne relaxed against the large trunk of a tree in the Forbidden Forest. Squirrels and sprites raced each other on the branches, dodging the web a young acromantula had spun.

A small bowl of blueberries rested next to him. He occasionally tossed a few to one of the passing creatures. One particular sprite kept trying to sneak around him to steal more but the fact that it was glowing a lovely purple made the task a bit difficult.

Finally the sprite gave up its stealth mission and focused its attention on giving Wayne a pout.

"I shall name you Squishy and you shall be my Squishy," Wayne said as he held up a palmful of berries for the sprite.

"Moony, I've found it! I've found it!"

Remus looked up from the ridiculously large book he was reading. It was an old tome on ritualistic bonds written nearly seven hundred years before and was an incredibly dry read. If it was for
anything other than his family he wouldn't have bothered reading past the first page.

But it seemed that it was no longer necessary and that he could abandon the dull work of Sir Agravaine Isolm.

Remus hurried to his friend's side. "What is it? What did you find?"

"It's not a bond, Moony," Sirius said, holding up a handwritten journal. The scrawl was nearly illegible but looked remarkably like Sirius' own so it was no wonder he could read it. "It's not a bond!"

"What are you talking about?" Remus took the journal in his hands, trying to decipher what it said.

"The bond, it's not a bond at all. We've been thinking it was some sort of familial bond Harry formed with Natasha because of what happened or because he felt a connection with her like with Lily. It accepted her as his second mother and Harry became Hadrian." Sirius moved to balance on his toes in the chair, looking up wide eyed at his friend. He was speaking quickly, excitedly, barely able to one word out before the other. "But that's not what happened at all. Remember what we were thinking about why Dumbledore never realized that Harry Potter had gone missing all these years?"

"That he put up wards to keep him hidden. Since there was no news that some grateful witch or wizard or a Death Eater looking for revenge finding him, he must've assumed the wards were working properly. He wouldn't have expected any correspondence with the Dursleys considering how much Petunia detested magic so that wasn't a cause of concern either."

"Exactly! But what kind of wards? Not just any old ones, surely, since any pureblood worth their coat would be able to track it down in a muggle place. And for the Boy-Who-Lived, a celebrity not long after his first birthday? Only the best will do, even if they're not the safest for the boy or even the most legal." Sirius snatched the journal from Remus' hands and ran his fingers down the pages hurriedly, searching for something. With a noise of triumph he held the journal up to show Remus, his pointer finger placed at specific paragraph.

"This guy here, Widmark White, says that a botched blood based ward has similar effects to a ritual binding."

It took only a short moment for Remus to understand the implications of what Sirius was saying. "The wards Dumbledore attempted to use to hide Hadrian caused the bond?"

Sirius nodded his head enthusiastically. "We'll need to see Hadrian in person to confirm, of course, but everything White wrote matches. We know that Lily had some kind of vision about that night and that she was probably the reason why Hadrian survived. We haven't been able to prove it but if this turns out to be true then we can."

"Protection like that, especially a willing sacrifice, would be an incredibly strong foundation for protective blood wards." Remus realized.

"The kind that were declared illegal years ago because the minister at the time decided that anything involving sacrifices of any kind were dark." Sirius said.

"It would've been easy for someone like Dumbledore to raise blood wards anchored to blood relatives. It would've kept Hadrian hidden and safe from any disgruntled followers of Voldemort, but also everyone else." Remus' eyes widened. "That's why Dumbledore was going to leave him with Petunia. She was Harry Potter's only blood relative that was closely related enough for the wards to take."
A frown took over the werewolf's face. "But Petunia was a muggle, or maybe even a squib like Lily thought. She wouldn't have had enough magic to help sustain any sort of wards and her son didn't get a Hogwarts letter as far as we know so he wouldn't have either. Any wards would've been reliant on Hadrian's magic alone."

"Mhm," Sirius nodded. "And no matter how powerful Hadrian is, having a constant pull on his magic for over a decade, especially during the years his core was forming, would've left its damage. I'm not sure what kind, White wrote that it depends on the wizard and the wards, but it couldn't have been good. Anyone who knows a thing about blood based wards would've known this."

Remus slid into the chair next to Sirius, suddenly looking tired. "The question now is whether or not Dumbledore knew about the consequences of what he attempted to do, if this is what happened."

Sirius sighed. "As much as I want to blame another thing on the old man, I honestly doubt he did. From we know of him he's only dabbled in magic outside of the Transfiguration and Alchemy, enough to carry a conversation but not enough to be more than passably familiar with it."

They sat silently in thought for several long minutes. Sirius tapped his finger against the spine of the journal that had finally given them their long sought after answers, his mind whirring. Remus had a thoughtful frown on his face - his eyes occasionally falling on the journal in his friend's hands.

Eventually Sirius opened his mouth to speak, "So, which one of us is calling Natasha?"

Dean wasn't surprised when George stood up on the table in the middle of breakfast and announced that there was going to be an end of year party outside near Hagrid's hut. He had been one of the Gryffindor emissaries that had asked Hagrid for permission. The gatekeeper had excitedly agreed and had even offered to bring in some of the nicer beings from the forest out to the students. Dean had politely turned the offer down - Hagrid's habit of looking the most dangerous creatures in the eye and call them adorable was well known by now.

George quickly called out that information was going to be put up in the common rooms before McGonagall forced him back into his seat.

Excited chatter broke out in the Great Hall following George's announcement, questions and offers filling the room.

"Is there going to be any food?" Ron asked. Dean wasn't surprised at this either, considering that Ron had fallen in love with nachos at the study session sleepover. Not even his intense dislike of anything to do with Slytherins had stopped him from asking Hadrian about muggle food.

"Yeah, the house elves agreed to set up buffet tables," Dean answered. Ron looked confused for a moment even though Dean was positive there were buffets in the wizarding world. "They said they would make sure the food didn't get cold and that bugs wouldn't get on them."

"Wicked. I'll be there," Ron said before turning back to his plate.

"There's also going to be a Quidditch pick up game." Dean added but was ignored. He shrugged and turned to talk to Seamus - just to see the Irish boy already talking to a perplexed Hermione. Dean held back a laugh at the irritated look on his friend's face.

"Why throw a party? Surely the leaving feast will be more than enough celebration for passing the exams."

"Well, it's just a feast, not an actual party. At the party there's gonna be music, dancing, games, and
all that good stuff." Seamus said. "Besides, it's not like we're going to miss the feast. Why not just have both?"

Before Hermione could reply, Lavender let out a squeal as an idea hit her.

As Dean listened in amusement as Lavender talked about having a fashion show, he noticed Hermione look intently in Quirrell's direction. He thought the defense teacher was a strange man to have a crush on, but he wasn't going to say anything.

Witches were scary.

Quirinus Quirrell stood in front of an ornately framed mirror.

His hands twitched at his sides, a sheen of sweat covered his forehead, and his tongue repeatedly darted out to wet his dry lips. He had been standing in front of the Mirror of Erised for nearly an hour now and was no closer to his prize than when he had started.

With each passing minute and the rising feeling of failure, Quirrell felt his heart skip a beat in terror. His master was growing more and more unhappy and Quirrell knew his failure was only going to end in pain for him.

"Where is it, Quirrell?"

Color fled from Quirrell's face at the angered voice. "M-Master-"

"Where is the stone!"

"It is here, I am sure of it, but I do not know how to retrieve it." Panic was growing in Quirrell's chest and the palms of his hands felt clammy. He hadn't believed that Dumbledore would have put up any actual protection for stone beyond that of the half-breed's wretched beast. The other traps were much too easy to get through and Quirrell had been sure that the old man had finally lost it. Now he realized that the perceived ease was itself a trap.

"Give me the stone, Quirrell, or I shall show you even in this state how feared I am!"

Quirrell's knees nearly buckled under the weight of his master's contempt. "Show me how, Master, show me how!" He begged.

"Ah, Professor Quirrell, what brings you here?"

Quirrell spun on his heel at the voice, raising his wand up, to see Dumbledore standing in the archway of the room. The older man seemed to be without a care in the world, the damned twinkle in his eye nearly making Quirrell twitch in his eye nearly making Quirrell twitch.

"H-headmaster," Quirrell attempted even as he resigned himself to having been caught. The old man wasn't supposed to be in the castle, he had seen to that. And with the teachers preparing for the summer break and the students attending the celebration the irksome blood traitor had spoken of he had thought there would be no one to stand in his way of getting to the stone.

"Now, Quirinus, I do believe you can drop the charade now. It will do you no good." Dumbledore said as if he was speaking to one of his errant students that had been caught in some sort of mischief. It made Quirrell want to grind his teeth together.

Quirrell brought himself up to his full height, letting the anxious look fade from his face. "Hello,
Dumbledore. What brings you here?" He threw back at the headmaster who looked much too calm for Quirrell's taste.

"I was preparing to make a trip down to the ministry when the detection ward I had laid were set off. Concerned, I quickly made my way down here in order to-"

Dumbledore was cut off when Quirrell suddenly sent an acidic green curse his way. Dumbledore dodged the spell, showing surprising nimbleness for a man his age, and sent his own - considerably less lethal - curse in return.

Quirrell knew not to underestimate the other man in a duel, despite having done so in regards to the protection of the stone, and aimed to tire Dumbledore out enough that he stood a better chance. He hoped the headmaster's general idleness and less than stellar diet would work in his favor - even as he found himself quickly losing his breath much faster than his opponent.

"Have you come for the stone, Quirinus?" Dumbledore questioned casually as though he wasn't in the middle of an intense duel with a traitor. It raised Quirrell's hackles enough that the man sent an overpowered cutting hex that was too fast for Dumbledore to dodge completely. The old man lost his small finger on his left hand and he had to quickly stem the blood flow. "Have you come to retrieve the stone for your master?" He continued, his words much more strained than before.

Quirrell made to respond but was interrupted by a hissing voice. "Let me see him, Quirrell."

Not wishing to upset his master even more Quirrell quickly followed his instructions, reaching up to unwrap his turban as he slowly turned so that his master would be facing Dumbledore.

"Dumbledore," His master hissed.

"Tom," Dumbledore said wryly.

Quirrell held back a pained moan at the sudden intense pressure he felt throughout his body. He knew without a doubt that his master was displeased with the name Dumbledore had called him, though he did not know why.

"Do not call me that wretched name! I am Lord Voldemort and the stone will be mine!"

Quirrell felt himself grow weaker as his master's anger rose. He wasn't sure he would be able to last much longer if his master didn't calm down or Dumbledore was taken care of shortly.

Dumbledore seemed to know this as well as he suddenly raised his wand and sent off a purple tinted curse at Quirrell's back. Having not seen it coming and his master not being one to shout any warning, the spell struck him right between his shoulder blades. His robes were ripped to shreds as well as the skin of his back, cutting all the way through to his spine. Quirrell screamed in pain and fell forward - breaking his nose and right wrist with his graceless landing.

His wand fell from his grasp and it caused to much pain to reach for it. He knew that the moment the curse had struck him that he had failed his master and that he would die. He had been promised riches and power and he had nothing to show for it except for a failed attempt at outsmarting Albus Dumbledore and his reputation forever sullied, either for being a traitor or a spineless idiot.

Quirrell closed his eyes and let go. He ignored his master's righteous screams for him to get up and fight as well as Dumbledore's reassurances of second chances.

He had failed his master and his master had failed him.
The Great Hall was alive with excited conversations for their plans for the summer and reminiscing about the school year. The teachers were just as ecstatic for the to finally draw to a close as their students, though they were able to not let it show too much.

Ravenclaw was especially happy and it only took a look at the house point hourglasses to know why. They were easily in the lead with Slytherin a close second and Gryffindor and Hufflepuff practically tied for third. The house of the intelligent had broken the house of cunning’s six year winning streak.

Terry happily collected his winnings from Lisa, who had a sour look on her face that was ruined by the twitching of her lips.

The Gryffindors couldn’t even find it in them to complain.

Hadrian, Terry, Lisa, Neville and Wayne had elected to sit with their respective houses for their last day, though Hadrian was beginning to regret as Draco had taken to whining to anyone who would listen that Slytherin deserved the House Cup.

Hadrian refrained from pointing out that Draco and his bodyguards were responsible for most of the point loss in their year only because he could see Tracey's control was slipping. Hadrian briefly wondered if there was still time to have points taken away and if Tracey hexing Draco would be counted against them.

"Hey, where's Quirrell?" Lily asked, her eyes on the staff table. The students who heard her looked up and noticed that the stuttering professor was missing.

"Maybe he's sick?" Millicent offered.

"Maybe that vampire finally got him," Theo said, not seeming to care very much about the answer. Theo had been one of the students who had taken to skipping Quirrell's classes altogether - citing that it was a waste of his time and that he would rather have a head start on getting to his next class.

Daphne turned to Hadrian. "What do you think, Romanoff?"

"What? I don't know." Daphne arched her eyebrow like she didn't believe him. "Why would I know where the man is?" The blonde rolled her eyes but dropped it. Hadrian still wasn't sure she believed him.

His attention was dragged away when Lily changed the subject to what they were doing over the summer. He listened patiently as the first years bragged about their planned trips out of the country or moaned about having to go to this family function or that one.

When it was his turn he simply said, "I'm starting an internship at Stark Industries." He had decided to stick to the truth while not mentioning anything that would sound off even to purebloods. His internship was actually a part of his training on intelligence gathering - Agent Uncle had apparently thought that learning secrets from someone who knew there was a spy and who the spy was would be the best. Hadrian had wanted to sic Clint on the man.

Hadrian hadn't expected Theodore Nott of all people to choke on his drink at his statement.

"Stark Industries? As in Tony Stark, one of the richest men in the muggle world and practically unparalleled genius inventor? That Stark Industries?" Theo questioned incredulously, his eyes wide. He didn't seem to notice the looks he was receiving for his reaction.

"Yeah," Hadrian confirmed slowly. He definitely hadn't expected any of the Slytherins to know who
Tony was, especially a pureblood like Theo. "Uncle Tony set it up for me. Nepotism is great sometimes."

Draco sent him a glare at that. Hadrian ignored it.

Theo's jaw fell open a little. "Wait, your Uncle Tony is Tony Stark?"

"Yeah." It wasn't as if Hadrian had to keep it a secret, it just had never occurred to him to bring up exactly who his Uncle Tony was. He briefly wondered if Theo also knew about Tony being a superhero. "How do you know who he is? I didn't think people who didn't know about the non-magical world would even know his name."

Theo had finally gathered himself, the blatant shock fading from his face and harmless curiosity replacing it. "My own uncle has had various dealings with Stark Industries in the past few years that have proven quite lucrative." He explained in a low voice, not wanting to expose his family’s dealings to everyone. Realization filled his eyes. "In fact, it was around ten years ago that Stark Industries started up their magical department, according to my uncle."

Hadrian could easily see that Theo had connected the dots between Hadrian's age and the addition of the Magical Research Departments of Stark Industries. Instead of saying anything, Hadrian only nodded to confirm it, not seeing the harm. This could in fact make dealings with the other boy easier down the line.

He wondered if any of the ones listening in would bother to find out who his uncle was and how they would be around him if they did. Money and power talked, magical or not.

Across the room Neville found himself staring in disbelief - along with the other Gryffindors.

They had all been happily talking about their summer holidays, making plans to meet up, Dean explaining to Cormac McElaggen what an amusement park was, when an argument had broke out between Hermione Granger and Ron Weasley.

Ron - apparently - had noticed that Quirrell wasn't sitting at the staff table and had made the mistake of saying good riddance in ear shot of Hermione. She had immediately began scolding him for disrespect to a teacher, an admonishment the Gryffindor first years had long since grown tired of listening to.

Ron had responded by calling her a know-it-all teacher's pet - which only made her face flush and her ire grow stronger.

"Who cares where the git is! The only professor worse than him is Snape!"

"You watch your mouth, Ronald!" Hermione sounded remarkably like a mother berating her errant child, Dean thought. "It's probably because of students like you that he doesn't wish to show his face anymore!"

"What are you on about now?" Ron's entire face had gone as red as his tie.

"Why would a man as soft hearted as Professor Quirrell want to be surrounded by students that were so mean to him? Skipping his classes, mocking his stutter, starting that defense club because they viewed him as incompetent. Honestly, it's a wonder he lasted as long as he did!"

"You were part of the club, you crazy bint!"

"Only to let Professor Quirrell know what was going on!" Hermione admitted. Her mouth snapped
close when she realized what she had revealed but after a moment she tilted her chin up to show she didn't care.

"You joined to spy on us?" Parvati sounded scandalized.

Hermione's cheeks had pinked at the scrutinizing attention she had on her, but she continued on. "Professor Quirrell asked me to sit in on a few meetings to find out why everyone was behaving so rudely. He was obviously heart broken so I agreed."

"You're insane!" Ron exploded. He was getting quite worked up about something he hadn't wanted anything to do with until his mother had forced him to.

"What was the point?" Dean asked Hermione.

"What?"

"What was the point?" Dean repeated. "Of spying, I mean. The club was signed off on by McGonagall and we had older students supervising at all times. You should know that, so it wasn't like Quirrell could've done anything about the club. What was the point then?"

Hermione opened her mouth to respond then seemed to realize she had nothing to say to that. "W-well, I had figured he wanted to know what you all were doing so he could change his lesson plan a bit so there wouldn't be anymore skipping."

"But he didn't do that," Seamus pointed out. "He still had us on shield charms by the time exams were coming up. So you spied for nothing."

Hermione huffed and moved to sit at the end of the table - away from the other first years - and pulled out a book none of them had noticed she had.

"Insane," Ron muttered.

At the Hufflepuff table Sally Anne wondered what was going on at the Gryffindor table. Wayne glanced at the table, shrugged, and went back to eating.

Hadrian ran into his mother's open arms and allowed himself to be lifted and spun.

"Hey, Bright Eyes, guess what?" Clint grinned beside them, a knowing glint in his eyes.

"Should I be worried?" Hadrian asked his mom when she set him back down on the floor.

Natasha stared into her son's beautiful eyes - once again swearing that there was something blue hiding in them - and smiled.

"Congratulations, Probationary Junior Agent Romanoff," she said seriously. "You've been cleared for a second year at Hogwarts School for Witchcraft and Wizardry. Your objective? To assist in the disillusionment of Albus Dumbledore. Do you accept?"

Hadrian's eyes widened in disbelief. Not only was he being allowed to return to a school that could've killed him, he was going to help take down the man in charge of the school. He wasn't sure why his mother was so set on the man to the extent of letting him go back for his second year, but he wasn't going to look a gift horse in the mouth.

"I have one question."
Natasha arched an eyebrow.

"Will there be cookies?"

End of Part I
As Much As Things Change

Chapter Notes

Warning: Unedited. Short. Set up for Part II. Cop Out.

Note: Sorry for the lack of updates for so long. CA:CW has me all soured on some very key characters. (I think we can agree that no matter which team we're on - Iron Man, Cap, Neutral - that Clint's characterization was not.)

Hadrian barely noticed how fast the summer raced by.

The first week after he got home was spent being forced by Agent Uncle and his mom to write out a detailed report on his time at Hogwarts - he had to redo the whole thing because he misspelled 'transfiguration' one time in the whole thing.

Thankfully after he finished it and was brought up to speed on what they had been doing from their side he had been set free.

Only to immediately be captured by Pepper, Bruce and Remus and made to study for his non-magical exams as well as the magical exams on subjects Hogwarts didn't comfort. He was pretty sure that the whole of Ravenclaw didn't spend as much of their summer doing schoolwork.

"Stop pouting, Hadrian, we're almost finished," Bruce admonished.

"Of course, once we're done with this you have to go take the aptitude test to be considered for a Mentor," Remus added with a grin.

Hadrian groaned and let his head drop on the table. Pepper just reached over, lifted his head up by his hair and slid his notebook under him before letting his head drop back down.

He thought he was finally free when he took his exams and aptitude test only to turn around and find Tony and Jane staring at him with identical creepy smiles.

"What do you mean you're making me work directly under you and Auntie Jane? I thought I was gonna be with the newbies! Now all I'm gonna be doing is fetching coffee!"

"No son of mine is going to go through his life not knowing how the components needed to build a cell phone that doubles as a laser," Tony waved off his indignance.

"I already know how to make a phone into a stun gun, doesn't that count?" Hadrian paused. "And I'm not your son!"

Tony ruffled the boy's hair. "Says who?"

"I'm telling Mom!" Hadrian knocked Tony's hand away and ran off in search of his mother. It took a moment for Tony to realize the danger he was in before he started chasing after the eleven year old.
"Happy birthday, Hadrian!" Lisa, Terry, Neville and Wayne chorused.

They were crowded around Wayne's laptop in the Hufflepuff's bedroom. Lisa was wearing her usual braids but strand of shocking red ran was weaved into one of them. Neville's hair had lightened, looking more like it did when he was a baby. Terry had grown even more and had been put slightly to the back so that he didn't block anyone. Wayne's eyes looked closer to silver than grey and his hair had gotten longer.

"Did you get our presents?" Lisa asked, leaning forward so her face took up most of Hadrian's screen.

Hadrian chuckled. "Yeah, they got here yesterday. So..." He reached over to pick up a sheet of paper off his desk. He adjusted his glasses in a pompous manner, straightened his back in a pompous manner and cleared his throat in a pompous manner before he began to speak... pompously.

"Thank you, Lisa Ann Turpin, for your thoughtful gift of a dueling book about dueling rules from around the world and throughout history. Please pass along my thanks to your sister and parents as well for their participation," Hadrian read, his voice reminding Neville of his Uncle Algie.

Lisa rolled her eyes at the performance while Wayne was fighting a smile as he tried to keep Terry from knocking them both to the floor from laughing too hard.

"I would also like to give thanks to Terrence Benjamin Boot the Second for his wonderful gift in the form of a magical poker set. My mother would also like to give thanks." Hadrian winked at the boy. "In addition to the already given thanks I would also like to give thanks to Neville Franklin Longbottom for his gift of a book about Russian magical clans. I shall endeavor to use this in some way against Draco Lucius Malfoy."

Wayne let out a howl of laughter before he caught himself. It only made Terry laugh harder and Lisa started hiccuping.

"And to Wayne John Hopkins," Hadrian lifted his eyebrow in the Lythari's direction. Wayne shrugged. "I say thank you for your gift of a T-shirt with the image of a wolf on it."

With a smirk Hadrian crumpled up the paper and tossed it over his shoulder. "You guys are awesome."

"Well, yeah," Lisa said obviously. Wayne rolled his eyes and Neville gave a toothy smile.

"Now in honor of it being exactly six years since the infamous sixth birthday you should tell us what happened," Terry declared.

"Ha! Nice try."

Terry pointed at the webcam. "Mark my words, Romanoff, I will find out what happened!"

Hadrian blinked slowly then turned his attention away. "So, Neville, how are things going with you?"

Lisa snorted. "Well, we know who your favorite is."

"I know what Wayne's been up to, I'm ignoring Terry and you're a girl going through puberty... I don't want to know."

Lisa's face flushed in anger and embarrassment. She itched to reach for her wand even though it
wouldn't do her any good.

Somewhere Natasha and Pepper felt a disturbance in the Force.

Somewhere elsewhere Darcy nearly fell out of her seat laughing.

Elsewhere somewhere Jane reached for another cup of coffee.

Terry laughed. "I'll speak at your funeral, mate."

"Gran ordered me merlily seeds for doing well on the exams and next week will be the perfect time to plant them in the greenhouse," Neville said, hoping to defuse the situation.

"Merlily?" Wayne questioned.

"Flowers that when ground up can be added to certain potions to make them taste better - but only if they're in the proper bloom, which is when they're a certain shade of green. They're also medicinal herbs for merfolk which is where they got their name," Neville explained.

Terry clasped a hand on Neville's shoulder. "Way to go, dude. Just think of what she's going to get you for your birthday."

At that Hadrian, Neville and Wayne shared a look.

Lisa - the gracious person that she was - decided to ignore that for the moment. "I just hope she didn't get you the same thing I did."

Terry snorted softly. "I doubt his Gran knows anything about comic books, Lees."

"How'd you know?" Lisa asked, sounding scandalized. Hadrian smothered a bark of laughter.

Terry blinked. "Know what?"

"Terry, you're so weird." Wayne shook his head.

Hadrian absently waved goodbye to Loki and Remus - they were going to pick up Wayne and take a trip to the some magic forest to go on a run.

He would've stopped and said a proper goodbye but he was balancing a tray of scalding hot coffee that he needed to get to Jane as soon as possible.

A smaller tray for the other scientists was floating behind him.

Charlotte Hopkins ushered the two men into her home.

"Wayne is just finishing up. He'll be down in a moment," Charlotte said.

"It's a pleasure to see you again, Mrs. Hopkins," Remus said with a smile.

Charlotte smacked her forehead. "Oh, where are my manners? It's good to see you as well and please call me Charlotte."

"Well, Charlotte-"

"Oh! My brownies!"
Remus watched as the woman scurried off to the kitchen. "You know, I don't think I've ever actually completed a conversation with her."

"What's on your agenda for today?" Bruce asked as he placed a plate of eggs and bacon in front of Hadrian. A plate with easily three times as much was put in front of Steve.

"Neville spent the night with Wayne so I'm gonna video chat with them after I eat," Hadrian answered as he popped the yoke and dipped his bacon in it.

"Why didn't Terry or Lisa stay the night?" Steve asked politely, even though the thought of a young girl staying over at her male friend's place was odd to him.

"Terry's dad took them out to London yesterday and they ended up crashing at Terry's before they could make it to Wayne's," Hadrian explained.

Bruce nodded. "And after you talk to them?"

Hadrian shrugged. "I have a clear schedule for a change. It's weird."

Bruce sent Steve a pointed look over Hadrian's head. Steve looked confused. Bruce gestured at Hadrian and realization filled Steve's face.

"Oh, uh, Hadrian?"

"Yeah?" Hadrian asked around a mouthful of bacon.

"Maybe you and I could go for a walk? I could show you the old hangouts," Steve ventured hesitantly. He was sure that a twelve year old boy wouldn't want to waste his precious free day listening to a twenty five year old man talk about the old days.

"Sure!" Hadrian chirped, surprising Steve and making Bruce smirk. "Can we get ice cream?"

"Uh, yeah."

Bruce laughed at the blond man's lost look. "No matter how much time has passed one thing has stayed the same. Kids will do almost anything for a chance of ice cream."

"Hey, you helped Uncle Steve trick me!"

"You tricked yourself. Now finish your breakfast then go wash your hands and face."

"Do you think Uncle Tony would've called Uncle Steve 'Uncle Steve' if Uncle Steve hadn't gone down in that plane?" Hadrian asked brightly.

"How many times can someone say 'Uncle Steve' in a single sentence?" Steve wondered aloud.

Bruce grinned. "I don't know, Hadrian, why don't you ask him next time you see him."

Hadrian threw his head back and cackled.

Albus reread the letter he had received for the third time despite already knowing what it said.

He had sent Remus a letter in which he had offered the man a job as the defense professor now that the position was once again open. Albus had figured with the discriminatory legislation and general
prejudice against the younger man's affliction that he would be in desperate search of work.

Sirius may have inherited the vast Black fortune upon taking up the mantle of Lord Black and as such have the ability to support the two of them several lifetimes over but Albus was certain that Remus still had a problem with accepting what he would view as charity.

With this it was a surprise when the man declined his rather generous offer. Remus explained that he was already under the employ of another academic institute and the pay was more than sufficient. He hadn't told Albus the name of the school he worked for - which would have at least given Albus a more accurate understanding of where the werewolf was living.

He hadn't even answered Albus' casual wondering of how Sirius was faring.

After first reading the letter Albus had considered offering the position to Sirius - who would surely have brought Remus along with him - but he wasn't sure if the reckless man would be a proper professor, despite having been a reputable Hit Wizard in his younger days. Even now Albus was sure the man preferred the life of carefree bachelor and he wouldn't be able to take his teachings as seriously as he should - if he accepted at all.

Now Albus was left with hiring someone less than qualified for the position as he couldn't risk Severus falling victim to the unconfirmed curse.

Gilderoy Lockheart was an extravagant man with an empty smile and an even emptier head. Albus had always wondered how the man had been sorted into Ravenclaw - he certainly had enough cunning for Slytherin if he could fool so many people into thinking he was capable of higher thought.

The man had actually written Albus to generously offer his services after word had gotten out that Quirrell had disappeared without a trace.

With Remus declining and Severus being a non-option Albus had no choice but to hire the fraud lest he wanted to deal with whoever the Ministry would try to foist on him.

Albus hoped the man's reputation would be enough to keep people's attention away from the disasters of the previous year. The students might even be blinded enough by Lockheart's glamorized adventures to put an end to that blasted club of theirs.

He still couldn't believe Minerva had allowed it to happen - letting the houses interact so freely without proper supervision by one of the staff. Surely having the club split between each house would be a better idea - to keep the children of less than reputable families from getting the wrong ideas.

Regardless he was left with hiring Lockheart.

It frustrated him more than it should. Hiring Remus would have meant more than keeping that outrageous man out of his school for at least another year - he would've been that much closer to figuring out where Harry Potter was.

Albus was no longer certain that Sirius and Remus had taken the boy themselves - though he thought it unlikely - but he was certain that Sirius' role as the boy's godfather would allow him to make great strides toward finding him.

It seemed that now he had to try a more direct approach and find another way to bring the two to him.
Perhaps he could call for a meeting with the old crowd. He would have to let them know about Voldemort's undead status much sooner than he wanted to but it would be worth it to finally have Harry Potter back in his grasp.

Once again he cursed himself for never bothering to check the Dursley house not even one time during all those years. At the very least he should've stayed behind to ensure Petunia had found the boy on her front step and taken him in. Then he would've known that Harry Potter was where he should be and that the wards had been raised properly.

Muggles did say that hindsight was twenty twenty. He supposed they got a few things right after all.

Lucius sat alone in the reading room, Narcissa having gone off to yet another meeting with Amelia Bones. The women weren't going to leave anything to chance, especially as they both had personal stakes in it.

Lucius had at first scoffed at his wife's proposed legislation. Dumbledore's admirers wouldn't possibly take any affront to the man's reputation as the greatest of all the headmasters. Then she had joined forces with the formidable Amelia Bones, who had her own backers. The rumors and gossip steadily spreading had been another point in their favor as with enough worry and fear even a blood traitor would agree.

He would support his wife's plan, if only to shame Dumbledore and further his own goals. Dumbledore would have no choice but to fall in line should a true disaster happen in his school walls and he had no way of stopping or controlling it. Even the most light-aligned of families would rally against the old man if it meant protecting their heirs. Lucius knew that there were few things all wizarding families agreed on and one of them was that children were precious.

If the legislation passed then it would be a great blow to both Dumbledore's reputation but his political standing which would only prove to be good things in Lucius' future.

He needed to create enough chaos to have the public call for Dumbledore's head without risking it being potentially compromised before it was time.

And he had the perfect way of doing it.

"Welcome back," Filius greeted his colleague happily when she walked into the teacher's lounge where he and Pomona were having tea.

"Thank you, Filius," Minerva took a seat at the round table and nodded to Pomona who poured another cup for her friend.

"How did it go?" Pomona asked as she passed the cup.

Minerva took a slow sip before answering. "I was able to meet with Headmistress Dawson who was more than willing to help in our endeavor. She and the Deputy Headmaster explained the logistics of changing a curriculum much like she had done when she took over for her predecessor. We had a long conversation on what classes should be introduced first, what years they should be available to, which should be mandatory and which should electives."

Here she paused to pull a shrunken package from her robe pocket and set it on the table. She unshrunk it and opened it before sliding it towards Filius and Pomona.

"She was kind enough to give basic lesson plans and costs for each class we spoke about so that we
could make decisions that the budget would allow. Her deputy, Professor Thompson, referred several qualified witches and wizards who would be willing to take a teaching position should we choose."

"Merlin knows there's more than enough space for more classes." Pomona said. "And last I checked the school vault is quite filled."

"Between having the staff reduced, having the students buy their own supplies each year, and the house elves helping you and Hagrid grow our own produce, we have enough to introduce a minimum of six new classes." Minerva explained.

"There are donations to consider as well as the added tuition we'll get within the next few years thanks to the... 'baby boom'... that happened after the war to be taken into account." Filius added.

Minerva tipped her head. "I was hoping that you two would be willing to help me decide which classes to instate and who to hire once that is done."

Filius and Pomona agreed easily, more than excited to improve Hogwarts' standards.

"And what does Albus say to this?" Filius asked while Pomona skimmed through the list. Some of the classes she remembered being offered when she was a student but there were several she had never heard of. Mandatory wizarding and muggle customs were surely needed at the school though.

Minerva took another drink of her tea. "I have yet to speak with Albus about this. His mind is on another matter at the moment and I would be remiss to further burden him."

Filius sent her a sly grin. "How generous of you, Minerva."

"I do try," Her dark brown eyes sparkled in mirth.


"Wade, what are you doing?"

Wade Wilson dropped his head back to look at his confused (friend-almost boyfriend-frenemy.)

"Ah, baby boy, there you are. You're missing storytime!" Wade gestured grandly to the several stuffed animals he had arranged in front of him on the bed.

Peter sent them a strange look - he wouldn't put it past Wade to have carnivorous stuffed toys.

"What story are you reading them?" Peter had long since learned to just go along with Wade sometimes - it made things a lot less blood or burrito splattered.

"Blood and Burritos sounds like an awesome band name," Wade announced.

"Or the headline of a shoot up at Taco Bell."

Wade gazed at Peter adoringly.

"So what story were you telling them?" Peter asked, moving to sit on the bed. He picked up the closest toy - a cute little lamb - and put it in his lap. "Wade?"

Wade's head snapped up from where he was trying to set the lamb on fire with his gaze.
"I was just telling them all about Hadrian's summer. You know, to move the timeline along and get to his second year already. We've already had to deal with a re-write that didn't really change things."

Peter stared blankly at his friend.

"Wanna go grab something to eat?"

"Chimis!" Wade jumped up, slicing through the air with the katana that was suddenly in his hand.

The poor little lamb's head fell to the floor.

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