What We Are

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Summary

Sequel to What We May Be
The pureblood nobility are known as the Sacred 27, and they have ruled magical Britain without a monarch for centuries.
Lord Thomas Slytherin has a strong claim to the throne and he wants it badly, but it's not the only thing he desires.
Harry Potter is a seventh year Slytherin who has hunted down Tom's past and knows his plans for the future. He doesn't completely trust Tom, but that won't stop him from entering a relationship with the soon-to-be king.

Notes

Read "What We May Be" first or confusion will reign supreme.

Our Players
Harry Potter . . . Our Protagonist.
Lord Thomas Slytherin . . . The Love Interest and Man of Mystery.
Lucius Malfoy . . . Lord Slytherin’s Lackey.
Hermione Granger . . . Genius friend of Harry Potter; Elves’ Rights Activist.
Albus Dumbledore . . . The Many Faced Man.
Severus Snape . . . A Tool. Also, Complicated.
James Potter . . . Handsome Devil. Head of the Auror Department.
Lily Potter . . . Total Babe. Potion’s Master of Hogwarts.
Remus Lupin . . . Simply The Best. Also, Werewolf.
Sirius Black . . . The Most Interesting Man in the World.
Barty Crouch Senior . . . A Bad Father.
Barty Crouch Junior . . . A Worse Son.
Fenrir Greyback . . . Crazy Crazy. Not Hot at all.

When we last left our players, it was on the 21st of December at Lansdowne Palace and Harry Potter and Lord Thomas Slytherin had made feelings, intentions, and world altering plans known.
Lord Thomas Slytherin had confirmed to Harry Potter that he was in fact Tom Marvolo Riddle; half-blood son of Merope Gaunt and Thomas Riddle, a muggle. He has also laid bare his plans to disassemble the nobility of Wizarding Britain as revenge for being treated poorly in his youth.
Harry Potter, a half-blood himself, identifies with Lord Thomas Slytherin’s cause and has agreed to keep Lord Slytherin’s origin secret.

And Now We End Our Intermission. . .
A small cough interrupted the silence of the night and Harry and Lord Slytherin reluctantly disengaged from each other’s embrace.

James Potter was standing twenty feet away from them with a slack expression on his handsome face. Immediately behind him, with an almost imperceptible grin, was Severus Snape. Given how the man never smiled or displayed any sort of emotion other than apathy, Harry knew the man was ecstatic. James Potter catching his son sucking face with Lord Slytherin—a man of dubious morals who represented the pureblood agenda. What could be a better revenge on your childhood rival and/or bully?

“Harry?” James said weakly.

Harry straightened his robes and looked away from his father. “Hey, dad. I…uh…I’m okay, as you can see. I see Severus found you and told you I was alright and not in any danger.”

“Not that he believed me,” Snape drawled and pretended to look at his nails, even though his eyes were looking between Harry and James.

James remained staring for a moment longer before pulling his glasses off and cleaning them, something he did when he needed a minute to think. “Are you... I thought...” he took a deep breath, “I am going to assume my son isn’t under the imperius right now and that you have worked out your differences.” He was staring at Tom as he said this, the threat obvious in his gaze.

“Lord Slytherin and I have reached an understanding,” Harry answered.

“Looks like you reached more than just an understanding,” James muttered.

“Anyways, I am sure you have somewhere you need to be. Away from here, dad,” Harry snapped, his tone glacial, “I imagine Sirius or mum would like to talk to you. Inside.”

James frowned heavily, looking like he wanted nothing more than to stay outside and argue, but it was three to one, despite Tom remaining silent and Snape merely glaring. “Fine, but you and I will be discussing this.” James pointed at Harry, turned on his heel and walked back into the ballroom in a huff. Snape gave a small incline of his head to Lord Slytherin and followed James out.

Harry’s eyes remained on the doorway, but he could feel the heat radiating from Tom’s body as he pressed up against Harry, slowly being encircled within Lord Slytherin’s long arms.

“Are you going to be my noble defender now? My knight in shining armour? Are you going to protect me from those who seek to undermine me?” Tom asked in a teasing voice.

Harry felt his cheeks flush despite the cold. “I think you can manage just fine on your own.”

“I can but it’s nice seeing someone else do it for me,” Tom’s breath was hot on his ear, “Maybe you’ll be my guard dog. Protecting me from those who oppose me.”

Harry rolled his eyes since Tom couldn’t see his face. “I sincerely doubt it.”

Tom moved to in front of Harry, his red eyes glimmering with amusement. “You’re
thinking of actually defending me against attackers. Those who would come for my life if I become King.” Tom ran his fingers through Harry’s hair and tucked a loose strand behind his ear, “You’d be my bloodhound. I would send you to track down my opposition, sniff out their secrets and lies.

“I suspect most of the opposition will be my friends until you begin to dismantle the nobility,” Harry said quietly.

“Some of them will remain your friends even after. Like Draco Malfoy or Regulus Black. They don’t need the nobility to be successful. They both have more than enough money to remain as members of the elite.”

Harry scoffed and was about to answer, when he felt a pair of eyes on him. Inside the building, his mother stood near the doorway watching them. Her green eyes were shrewd and discerning. She pointed at him and curled her finger, beckoning him. “Oh, for Merlin’s sake.” He took a step forward but she shook her head and Harry realized she had been pointing at Tom.

“I think she wants to talk to you,” Harry muttered, mortified.

Tom had watched the little exchange with a smirk on his face. “Doesn’t everyone?” He swept forward imperiously, his robes stirring up the snow that had fallen. “I’ll meet up with you in a bit. Speaking of Regulus and Draco, why don’t you locate them? I imagine I will be quite busy for the foreseeable future.”

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Lily Potter watched him, her green eyes taking in every detail, from his ornately tailored robes to his perfectly coiffed hair. Tom almost wished he had found someone else to hold his interest instead of Harry if this was how he was going to be treated.

Arriving in front of her, he bowed and held out his hand. “Mrs. Potter. It is a pleasure to meet you.”

“I wish I could say the same,” she replied, putting her hand in his, expecting a handshake, but received a kiss on the back of her hand instead. “...Shall we go somewhere a bit more private? I assume you can’t stand the thought of being caught speaking to a mudblood.”

Tom frowned. Just how tarnished was his reputation among the light? “You would assume wrong then,” he replied coolly, but guided her to an alcove where they could be seen but not overheard. “It is unfortunate you have such a low opinion of me. I don’t believe I have done anything to warrant such a reaction.”

“Of course, you don’t,” she muttered before catching the hurt expression on his face. “I apologize. Today has been stressful with Bellatrix Lestrange running off with Harry and all that drama.” Lily looked away and crossed her arms.

A small lip tremble and a hastily averted gaze was generally enough to give people pause. No need to overact. Like everyone else, Lily Potter only thought he was in his early twenties. Being perceived as younger and more vulnerable than most of the political players had benefitted him repeatedly; it might be worth trying to foster a maternal instinct in her with regards to him.

He let out a soft sigh, just enough for her to hear. “Mrs. Potter, I understand. I really do,” he rubbed the back of his neck, going for the uncertain and nervous look, “I know I shouldn’t have asked Bella to get Harry but I wanted to talk to him in private first before the party...I know we’ve had disagreements, but I wanted to explain myself without the chance for eavesdroppers. I...I forgot there would be people worried about him. I am sorry for the stress I put you through today.” He blew
out a sigh and ran his fingers through his hair. “How about we start again? My name is Thomas.”

Lily pursed her lips and looked into his eyes, searching for something that she would be unable to find—he was a master occlumens, after all. “And I’m Lily.”

“It’s my pleasure to meet you,” he said sincerely...ish, and smiled weakly. “I thought Harry was more like his father, but having now met you, I can see that I was wrong.”

She gave him an amused look. “Flattery will get you nowhere. I just want to know what your interest is in my son.”

“Romantic,” he answered instantly. “I will admit that he has other aspects that I appreciate, but I find myself drawn to him for what we may be together more than anything else.” It was a completely honest answer. He preferred to pepper his lies with truths.

Lily Potter’s expression had become closed off quickly with his answer, like she hadn’t expected the honesty and wanted to contain her shock. “...And what if you’re made King? Would you just shove him into the background as you make one of the daughters of a pureblood family Queen? Would he be reduced to a mere consort or something like that?”

Tom frowned, managing to look earnest at the same time. “I understand that I appeal to many of the older pureblood’s looking for a monarch, but I am not a backwards facing traditionalist. I want to bring about the stability and decisiveness that a monarchy provides, but still work towards bringing change to wizarding Britain. I have no need for a Queen, and I will not be seeking one out to appeal to the masses.”

Who needed an heir if you were going to live forever?

Green eyes once again began to bore into him. “I—” Lily began, but was interrupted as Cornelius Fudge appeared at the alcove entrance.

“Ah! Here he is! Lord Slytherin I have been looking all over for you.” The Minister of Magic pushed his way into the alcove, driving Lily and Tom further inward, squashed together near the back. “I was hoping to speak to you about the Wizengamot vote on the second—”

Tom’s hand slashed across the small space that separated him from Fudge and Lily, “If you don’t mind, Minister, I was speaking to Mrs. Potter,” Tom said, an arctic chill in his voice. He did not like Fudge and was already looking forward to replacing him. Lucius said the man was easily manipulated, but Tom didn’t want some easily manipulated buffoon as the minister. Why did he have to appeal to some worm’s ego and string them along when he could have a puppet that obeyed his every command? Fudge would be gone within six months of his rule.

Fudge looked at Lily with surprise, like he had not seen her in the alcove with him. As if it were easy to overlook those who were not purebloods or members of the nobility if you were the minister. “Oh. Terribly sorry, but could I steal Lord Slytherin away from you, Mrs. Potter?” Fudge said in a pandering voice, like he was doing her a favour by interrupting their conversation.

Lily raised an eyebrow that immediately reminded him of Harry, the downward turn of her mouth showing her true opinion even though she opened her mouth to smoothly say, "Of course. That's fine."

“We can speak at a later date Mrs. Potter,” Tom assured her with a smile.

“That would be ideal,” she replied, and slipped past Fudge with her head held as high as any pureblood lady in attendance. Before she was completely out of his earshot, she muttered, “The
next few years are going to be interesting.”

‘They certainly will be,’ Tom thought.

Fudge watched Lily walk off. “Potter...Potter...She’s not related to James Potter, is she?”

Tom bit back the sigh he felt bubbling in his chest. “I would have thought you knew more about your department heads and their lives, Minister,” he chided. “She is James Potter’s wife and the Potions master of Hogwarts.”

All Fudge did was remind Tom of how so many had easily overlooked him in his youth because they assumed him to be a muggleborn or half-blood of some unknown family. No matter how talented you were, they would still ignore you if you had no pedigree.

“Oh...yes. I do believe I may have met her before,” Fudge said dismissively and smiled weakly at Tom. “As I was saying, Lord Slytherin, I wanted to discuss the Wizengamot vote set for the second.”

“What about it?” Tom asked stiffly.

“There is some concern that they may in fact vote against allowing you to ascend the throne and I wanted to see if you had any—” Tom cut the man off with a look.

“The Wizengamot has no say about what happens during Conclave. The Sacred 27 will decide if I am to be King. This is a matter for the nobility. I will attend the session and speak to them. If they take any action otherwise, they will start a civil war,” Tom gazed dismissively down at Fudge, “I suggest you use your influence to ensure that they believe that retaining a monarchy is beneficial. The Minister and the King need to be allies in this future. I doubt you would like to be known as the Cromwell of the magical world.” He straightened his robes. Tom certainly didn’t want to be Charles the First in that scenario, he thought amusedly.

Fudge blinked and stared at Tom for a moment, his chin wobbling. “What’s a Cromwell?”

Tom fought the urge to pinch the bridge of his nose. “Never mind...I understand that you are concerned about the Wizengamot, but we have nothing to fear,” Tom grasped Fudge’s shoulder and gave it a reassuring squeeze, “Together, we will return Britain to its proud heritage.”

A grin broke out on Fudge’s face and Tom wondered how quickly he would be able to get rid of the man. Six months would be too long to wait. Lucius had a wide variety of blackmail material, but Tom felt that Fudge should see who he had helped rise to power. The serpent that he had let into the garden, so to speak.

Tom smirked. It would be fun to kill him over a weekend. He could think of a few people who would like to help him in that endeavour.

“Send me an owl tomorrow with any other concerns. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I have been repeatedly cloistered away this evening,” Tom said, bowing.

“Ah. Yes. The people do need to see their soon-to-be king. Do enjoy the party, Lord Slytherin.” The Minister bowed in return and left.

Tom conjured a mirror, checked his appearance, and prepared for several hours of schmoozing.
It was too hot. His robes felt too constricting and there were so many people looking at him. Harry felt like a caged animal.

Tom had left him almost two hours ago, leaving Harry alone. He was unable to speak to Draco without Lucius present. Regulus had vanished before Harry had a chance to speak to him. There had been a few others he had recognized from Hogwarts, but the majority of the guests were purebloods who he only knew from peerage books.

The purebloods in attendance didn’t like to interact with halfbloods like him. Halfbloods whose fathers were just a thread away from being considered a blood traitor.

How many of these people had his father wanted to arrest but had been unable to do so because of their connections? How many had murdered or tortured or just taken advantage of people they considered to be less than them?

James had fared better than the last head of the Auror department—a muggleborn who had tried to arrest the patriarch of the Nott family. He survived a month before being demoted so hard that he hadn’t been seen since.

At least, Harry assumed that Daniels had been demoted and not murdered. His father would have mentioned if his predecessor had been murdered.

Probably.

He had seen his mother leave after she had spoken to Tom, and he desperately wanted to know what had been said between the two. Harry leaned up against the wall and fingered the stiff collar at his neck. He wanted to go outside again to cool off, but was hesitant to leave in case Lord Slytherin thought his date had ditched him. He also didn’t want to be caught outside by himself while surrounded by people who thought him less than human.

Harry spotted Tom and watched the future king as he spoke to the Greengrass matriarchs. He had been watching him on and off during the evening and it had been educational, watching how Tom could play a crowd. Tom was animated when he spoke to women and more stoic when he spoke to men. He was a bit louder and boisterous with the older men and serious and closed off with the current generation of Wizengamot and Conclave members.

He played the crowd with ease.

Tom Riddle had been born at the end of 1926, and even though Lord Slytherin looked like he was in his early twenties, he had over seventy years of experience of interacting with people, learning their strengths and weaknesses, their desires and fears. No one would be expecting this young looking man to have the mind of a much older predator.

Harry himself had certainly not expected it. He had initially perceived Tom as some spoiled pureblood or halfblood heir out to benefit himself and only himself. To find out tonight that Tom had been playing a long con and that it was going to culminate with the disassembly of the noble class had been a shock, to say the least.

Part of Harry still didn’t believe it.

What kind of Slytherin would work to destroy the source of their power? Tom had been building up this persona for years, laying the groundwork to take the throne for decades, and today he decides to share that he’s been working to destroy it all?
Could someone really be that petty?

Harry briefly thought of his Slytherin classmates.

Yes. Yes, they could.

He grabbed a glass of wine from a passing house elf and swirled it briefly before drinking. Life had certainly gotten interesting since he first met Lord Slytherin. Despite their talk tonight, he still had so many questions for Tom.

Why did he look so damn good? What was his timetable for going after the Sacred 27? What would he do when people figured out what he was doing? Would Tom kiss him again tonight? Did he have a plan if there was a revolt?

The question Harry was ignoring raced around in his mind, unvoiced but still present. He wasn’t uncomfortable with Tom’s true age. He enjoyed older men, and the fact that he looked young didn’t hurt...but why was Tom interested in him?

Tom had said that he enjoyed Harry challenging him and his ability to chase down his past, but they barely knew each other. They had exchanged some letters and had argued at midsummer...Tom barely knew him. Was he just going to be used and discarded?

He brushed his thumb against his lip and smiled softly. The kiss had been good, though. He had enjoyed that thoroughly. There was no denying the animalistic attraction between them. Another glass or two of wine and maybe he would act upon those animal instincts.

Harry drained the glass.

Big changes were coming to Britain, and Harry was not going to sit on the sidelines as the world changed.

Now, where was that red-eyed fuck?
Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Ulysses, I’m surprised to see you out tonight. I heard that you haven’t been feeling well.” Tom gave the Nott patriarch a miniscule incline of his head.

“No need for niceties, Lord Slytherin. Not among old friends such as us.” The old man’s voice and expression were far from friendly.

Tom didn’t quite frown, but his lips pursed into a thin line. “Of course, not at all. Is there anything I can help you with, Ulysses?” He flicked his wand casting a privacy charm around them.

“What in Merlin’s name are you doing associating with a half-blood? I saw you talking to that filthy mudblood that spawned him. Are you mad?” The veneer of civility wore off quickly and a piece of spittle landed on Tom’s cheek as Nott Sr. seethed.

Tom stared at the older man. There had only been a year difference between the two of them, but he remembered how Ulysses had been in their early years easily enough. He slowly wiped his cheek with the back of his hand and then brushed it against the front of Ulysses’ robes. The man’s bloodshot eyes narrowed angrily.

Tom sighed. How he was tired of having to explain himself to these pureblood aristocrats. “Have I ever displayed that I was unaware of the consequences of my actions? Has there ever been a time where I wasn’t acutely in control of all aspects of my life and interactions with others?” His voice had dropped to a whisper and a cruel expression stained his handsome face, transforming it into something ugly. “Well? Tell me, Ulysses—am I missing something vitally important or is it you who cannot see what is right in front of your face?”

Nott’s eyes were focused on Tom’s crimson red eyes and he licked his lips nervously. “You’re associating with a half-blood that has a blood traitor for a father,” he sneered. “Don’t bite the hand that feeds you, Riddle. I was one of the people that got you into this position, where you could be put on the throne and I am one of the people that remember where you really come from. Maybe you are missing what is in front of your face,” he said throwing Tom’s words back at him. “We want you as King because you are best suited to serving our needs and I say you need to get rid of the half-blood. The fact that you mentioned him to the Prophet makes my skin crawl.” Nott scratched the back of his hand as if to prove a point.

Tom stared down imperiously at the man. “Potter is the perfect indicator of how the half-blood and blood traitor public feels about me. Despite what you and the others may think, we do need the support of those lesser members of our kind. Associating with Potter is a boon to our cause; even though Potter is a half-blood, he is tolerable in comparison to any of the other options I had. It was either associate myself with a half-blood who would be dedicated to my cause or try to insinuate myself with someone from a family of blood traitors. Would you prefer me here with a Weasley?”

Nott’s disgusted expression was enough of an answer to that question. “He’s dedicated to the cause or is he dedicated to you?”

“It doesn’t really matter. I have him in my pocket now,” Tom answered, looking to end the conversation.
Ulysses Nott had been obnoxious fifty years ago, and he had only gotten worse as time had passed. He had been a year younger than Tom, but had still attempted to command him and harass him.

Tom fought a smirk down at the memory of when he had taught Nott a lesson about who was in charge in Slytherin house. Nott didn’t look him straight in the eyes for close to two years after that.

Maybe after the conclave Tom would give him a refresher.

Nott frowned and looked across the room to where Harry was leaning against a wall, staring at them. “He may be a Slytherin but it doesn’t mean he can be trusted...Cut the brat off from his family, his parents are close to Dumbledore and we can’t let him know our plans,” Nott commanded and walked out of sight, breaking the privacy charm.

The serpent in Tom screamed for him to go to Nott Manor tonight and kill the man in the slowest and most gruesome fashion possible: torture his son, his pride, for hours and break his mind, until the boy would kill Ulysses of his own free will.

It would be so easy and all he would have to do was obliviate the boy afterwards...

Tom shook his head briefly, clearing away the bloodlust. Nott would be taught a lesson, but only after he became King.

A hand rested on his arm. “Are you feeling okay?” came Harry’s voice and Tom looked into those lovely green eyes. “I saw you talking to Ulysses Nott. He’s an...” Harry paused, seeing someone looking at them, trying to listen, “Interesting fellow.”

Tom smirked and cast another privacy charm. “You could say that...This party is winding down. Shall I escort you home?”

“You mean walk me to the fireplace?” Tom noticed a wineglass in Harry’s hand. “I’m supposed to be back at Hogwarts by two o’clock...” Harry looked up at Tom through half lidded eyes, a mischievous smirk on his lips. “It’s only one, and they wouldn’t know if I came from here or from your house.”

He stared blankly at the younger man for what must have been a full minute, his mind emptier then an inferi’s.

Had Harry just—

Did he want to—

But they had just—

Tom raised his hand as he gathered his thoughts. As much as he would like to take Harry home and do wonderfully fun things with him, it was too early in their relationship. He didn’t want Harry to think he was fast...also, he suspected Lily Potter would somehow know.

She gave off that vibe of being omniscient.

“How many glasses of wine have you had?” Tom asked, drawing himself up to his full height and looking at the half empty glass.

Harry looked at his hand and seemed surprised to see it was holding something. “Oh! ...A
few. Four, maybe,” Harry swirled the wine around and drained the glass, “Five, now. I did stagger them out over the last few hours, though.” He licked his lips and Tom fought the urge to taste them. He was supposed to have more self-control than a hormonal teenager.

“As tempted I am to take you home, I am going to have to decline.” Tom put a hand at the base of Harry’s spine and started to guide him towards the fireplace. “What I would like to do would likely take more than an hour.”

“Hmm. That sounds like fun,” Harry said, putting the glass on a table they passed. “When will I see you next? I am trapped at Hogwarts for several more months, after all.”

Tom paused and thought for a moment. “I will be having a small New Year’s Eve celebration. I would like you to come. It will be more...intimate.”

“Who else will be there?” Harry asked, looking around. They were now standing near the fireplace, the area mostly empty of spectators.

Tom cupped Harry’s chin and brushed his thumb over Harry’s lips, the residual wine from his bottom lip smearing onto his finger. “Just a few close friends. Nothing you will have to worry about. Please say you’ll come.”

He tried not to think about how inebriated Harry must have been as the younger man enveloped his thumb in his mouth and gave it a quick suck. “I’ll be there.” Harry suddenly rose up onto his tip toes and kissed Tom deeply.

Tom wrapped his arms around the younger man and fell into the kiss, enjoying it immensely. He moaned as quietly as possible, but it was still loud.

Harry was a very good kisser.

Harry disengaged from his face and smiled. “See you then. Owl me the details.” He grabbed a pinch of floo dust and was gone in a flash of green.

Tom blinked at where Harry had been standing just a second ago. He was something. His doom, probably.

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Ginger tea. He could smell it. It smelled good. It would be perfect if he could only open his damn eyes and see where it was. Harry slowly pushed himself into a sitting position and remained there with his eyes glued firmly shut and his tongue dryer than Binns’ lectures.

His hand was taken and a cup was gently pushed into it. “Drink. It’ll help,” came his father’s voice and Harry slowly began to drink the hot tea and groaned as it nearly burnt his throat. “All of it.” James’ voice was a little firmer.

Harry gulped down the contents of the cup and finally peeled his eyes back and looked at his father, a blurry mass of red auror robes and black hair. He grabbed his glasses from the coffee table and once they were on, he determined he was in his mother’s quarters at Hogwarts.

Last night he had come through the fireplace and decided that the couch would be a suitable place to sleep; it was right in front of him and he wouldn’t have to crawl down to the dungeons while drunk. His parents would also see that he was home safe and not at the home of a man with questionable morals.
“Not that I don’t appreciate the tea, but doesn’t mum have a hangover remedy potion?” Harry asked and wiped his eyes before sliding his glasses back onto his nose.

“She said you needed to learn a lesson about underage drinking.”

Harry cocked an eyebrow at his father who did not look upset or angry; merely resigned. “I’m not underage unless we count muggle law.”

“You’re still have a developing brain, apparently.”

“Apparently?”

“Her words, not mine,” James said, putting up his hands in a placating gesture and gave Harry a worried look, his lips pressed into a straight line. “Harry, last night...when I found you and Lord Slytherin...were you...” he seemed unable to finish his sentence.

Harry flushed violently. He certainly had...more than an academic interest in Tom, but he really, really didn’t want to talk about it with his father. Sharing that kind of information with family was mortifying. “Were we what?” he asked nonchalantly. Harry hoped he could take a page out of Remus’ book and make it too awkward for his father to actually ask the question.

“Were you...” James frowned and began to glare at Harry. “I know what you’re trying to do. Moony used to do that when he was trying to dodge a question.”

Complete failure. Damn.

Harry stared at his father, wearing his patented blank expression he would don in Slytherin common room when something dramatic was happening and he wanted to eavesdrop. “Oh? Moony used to do that? Fascinating. Did you and Sirius train him to stop or did he realize what he was doing and decided to better himself?” Harry asked innocently.

James narrowed his eyes. “That’s not going to work.”

“What’s not going to work?”

“That.”

“What’s that?” Harry asked cheekily.

“You’re trying to change the subject!”

“Oh, for Merlin’s sake! Both of you stop!” said Lily storming into the room and glaring at the two of them on the couch. “James, I told you to leave it alone! Harry, don’t antagonize your father!”

“But he makes it so easy,” Harry replied with a Dumbledore-esque twinkle in his eye.

She pointed at him, threat evident in her eyes. “Don’t be acting like Sev. I already have one troublesome Slytherin in my life. You’re supposed to be the well-behaved one.”

“Draco doesn’t count as being in your life? Remember when he blew up Ron Weasley’s cauldron last year and everyone almost died because it was the Draught of Death and it was brewed poorly?”

“...That was Draco who did that?” she asked, her voice low. “You swore you didn’t know who did that.”
Harry shrugged. “Who says I knew the perpetrator when you asked me? Who says I’m not
lying at this very moment and throwing Draco under the knight bus?”

“You’re too perky for what should be a throbbing hangover,” James muttered.

“I suspect he’s been developing a tolerance down in the Slytherin common room,” Lily said
and began putting together a small breakfast in the kitchen area. “How was the rest of your
evening?”

“You can ask, but I can’t?” James asked incredulously.

“I’m asking about how his evening went, not what he was doing with Lord Slytherin.”

Harry sighed before getting up and filling the empty cup with beautiful, thirst quenching
water. “It was fine. Lord Slytherin schmoozed with a lot of people and I wandered around. Did some
people watching and talked to a few people every now and then. Had a few drinks,” he drained the
cup and refilled it, “Oh, Lord Slytherin invited me to a New Year’s party at his home. I already said I
would be attending.”

The room was quiet and Harry could feel the looks his parents were exchanging behind his
back; his mother’s argument about how he was of age and free to make his own decisions and his
father’s retort that teenagers could be stupid, especially if they were overconfident.

He would know.

Well, that’s how he assumed the argument went. His mother generally won their
disagreements, but would have to give James small concessions.

“Any idea who else will be there?” she asked stiffly and his father sighed heavily in
response.

“No. Some of his inner circle.” Harry turned around and leaned against the counter, looking
at his father’s disgruntled expression. “I expect Lord Slytherin will want me to meet them given how
he intends for me to work closely with him after Hogwarts. Not sure what position I’ll be in.”

“I think what position you’ll be in is fairly obvious,” James muttered.

Harry ignored him and turned to his mother, who was trying not to smile. “What did you
think of Thomas? You were talking for a bit.”

Lily’s hidden smile turned into a clear frown. “I can’t tell what is real and what isn’t. I know
that he is attracted to you, but I am concerned about how easily he can shift into a different skin. I
listened a bit to his conversation with the minister and he was pandering to Fudge. Not a far reach to
figure out he had been saying whatever he thought I would like to hear.”

“You eavesdropped on the minister and the would-be-king?” Harry asked, pretending to be
scandalized. “Mother, I am proud,” he gave her a tight hug, “I thought I had gotten it from dad, but it
turns out the nosiness came from you! A shocking turn of events has happened in the Potter
household on this day. I think I shall commemorate it. A plaque in bronze? Gold?”

Lily rolled her eyes. “Don’t change the subject. I will admit that I was impressed that a
pureblood knew his muggle history. Fudge didn’t even know who Cromwell was. Probably would
have been surprised to find out England had a civil war.”

“England had a civil war?”
Lily and Harry exchanged a look which said loads about purebloods and their lack of historical knowledge, unless it was magical history.

“England has had several civil wars. You really should study your muggle history more. It’s a very important part of your heritage and forgetting the past dooms us to repeat it,” Harry said in a Hermione-esque voice.

“...Right. I don’t know how you’ve managed to keep up on muggle history and magical history with all your Hogwarts studies and extracurricular activities,” James said. “Is this something Hermione decided to teach you at some point?”

“Oh, please. Hermione may try to teach dumb Gryffindors about history but she knows better than to approach a Slytherin with that kind of attitude,” Harry said, rolling his eyes, “I know my history because Binns is useless. I’ve been doing self-study ever since I found the curriculum for the class and it’s more satisfying. Some aspects of magical history are influenced by muggle events, but the magical textbooks don’t cover the impact of the muggle world and how it affects us. I’ve been studying muggle history to truly understand historical events in the magical world,” he paused, considering something, ”I should be getting extra credit.”

James blinked. “I had no idea.”

“If that surprised you, then prepared to be very surprised!” He rubbed his hands together and grinned. “I am going to be sitting the History of Magic NEWT this summer.”

“Really? I can’t remember the last time someone did the HoM NEWT,” said Lily.

“The first in five years. The second in eight. No one continues History of Magic past fifth year.”

“Hermione?” his mother said with a smile. She was rather fond of his bushy haired friend.

“Hermione actually attends Binns’ classes. It’s more impressive that I’m doing the NEWT without going to classes.”

“Well, now it’s not that impressive that you’re doing the NEWT for History of Magic if Hermione is going to,” James said, smirking.

Harry sighed loudly, his breath pushing his hair back. “Hermione Granger, always stealing my thunder.” He declined to mention what the other Slytherins thought of her swotiness.

James smiled. His mother wasn’t the only one with a fondness for Hermione Granger. His father had stated, more than once, that Hermione would be a lovey girl for him to date. He had looked so heartbroken when Harry said he only liked her as a friend.

“It’s a pity hardly anyone continues History of Magic...You’d think with the amount students have to pay for tuition, the school would be able to find another History professor,” James commented.

Lily opened her mouth to tell James exactly why he was wrong and how much money it cost for the upkeep of Hogwarts, but Harry darted into their line of sight. He had heard this argument too many times. “Let’s not get into this again. We know it costs a lot for Hogwarts upkeep,” he said placating his mother and then turned to his father, “And you need to pass your History of Magic NEWT and actually want to work at Hogwarts to even think of applying for the position. Most people who go for the History of Magic NEWT have a job in mind that they already want, and it is not the History of Magic job at Hogwarts.”

The three of them stood in an awkward silence, Lily eating a piece of toast, Harry drinking his water and James looking blandly towards them.

“Lily?” said his father.

“Yes?”

“He is too good at derailing conversations. I learned something about history and Hogwarts’ hiring system instead of finding out about Lord Slytherin,” James said with a small smile.

“He’s going to be a wonderful politician, or solicitor, or journalist, or scam artist,” she said in a chipper tone and with a bright smile that didn’t quite reach her eyes.

“Mother!” Harry exclaimed, offended, “I would never be a solicitor! I can’t believe you would think that of me. I am hurt.” He placed his hand over his heart and shook his head sadly.

“Agreed. I’d prefer not to see my son representing some criminal at a trial.”

“Of course you wouldn’t. I’d poke more holes in your evidence then Pansy Parkinson would Draco Malfoy’s condoms.”

Lily and James looked at him, their horrified expressions making him laugh.

Lily shook her head sadly. “I doubt Pansy Parkinson even knows what a condom is.”

“She’d probably think it’s a bird from America,” Harry muttered and smiled sweetly to his mother. “So, mum, mummy dearest, life giver, and light of my life, may I use your fireplace to go to the New Year’s party at Lord Slytherin’s home?”

She put her hands on her hips, but still nodded. “We’re going to be celebrating Christmas at the house so you can just use the floo there, but you have to tell me where Lord Slytherin lives and you have to be back by three in the morning.”

“You made him come home last night by two,” James protested, “Why does he get to stay out until three now?”

“New Year’s is different than the Lansdowne Yule ball.”

“Thank you, mum,” Harry kissed her cheek, “I’m going to head down to the dungeons. I need to get out of these dress robes and have a shower,” Harry said, darting out the door before they could realize he had managed to avoid most of their questions, like just who was in Tom’s inner circle.

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Eris hopped around his desk, dropping feathers and distracting him as he attempted to read the letter Tom had sent with his owl who was drinking from Eris’ water bowl. She had been upset at the appearance of this new and rather handsome owl.

“Get used to him. I expect you’ll be seeing each other more,” Harry muttered and went back to the letter.
Harry,

I believe the other evening was eye opening for the both of us. I only wish I had the
opportunity to spend more of the night with you, instead of dealing with ministry employees and
Wizengamot members vying for my favour.

As promised, here are the details to the New Year’s Eve party: It will be starting at 9pm at
Riddle manor. You are free to come through the floo or apparate over as you have been keyed into
the wards.

Harry raised an eyebrow at that. Tom must expect him to be visiting more often in the
future. Eh. Maybe it’s only a temporary addition to the wards. He shrugged and continued reading.

I did mention that my inner circle would be attending but I am uncertain if you remember
the discussion, honestly. You were rather inebriated.

Harry flushed and tried to forget what he had done while buzzed. Buzzed. Not drunk. Too
many people thought he was a lightweight.

The majority of those attending are aware of my plans for the future, but Lucius Malfoy and
several others of his mindset will also be attending. They are not in the know, so to speak, and thus I
entreat you not to speak of them.

As with the other night, I may not be able to enjoy your company as much as I would like,
and if you are approached by anyone whom seems untrustworthy, I would request that you seek
either me, Bellatrix Lestrange, or Severus Snape. They can be trusted to protect you.

He put the letter down and looked blankly at the wall. This was supposed to be a small
intimate gathering, not a game of cat and mouse with pureblood supremacists. Entering Lord
Slytherin’s world created more dangers then he had expected...but he could work with this. He was
in Slytherin, after all. Harry had ambitions, and Tom seemed more than willing to further their mutual
ideals.

I suggest you stay away from Bartemius (Barty) Crouch Jr., as he seems to have developed
a fascination with me and is likely to be aggressive with anyone I express interest in.

Sincerely, Lord Thomas Slytherin

Harry sat back and wondered if he should reply. He had agreed to attend and Tom didn’t
seem to expect him to change his mind. He would be attending, so there was no need to RSVP.

Snape and Lestrange would protect him if need be. Ha. That was hilarious. James would
likely choke if Harry told him that.
Bellatrix Lestrange and her husband were well known in the auror community as untouchable dark magic users. Snape and the Marauders held a mutual dislike and his father would swear up and down that Snape was equally dark.

Harry had asked his mother about James’ accusations towards her friend and she had agreed that Severus Snape studied, practiced and likely created dark spells but she didn’t believe that he would use them maliciously unless he was prompted to by an attack.

He knew in her heart of hearts that his mother was well aware of what Snape was like and that she tried to overlook some of Severus’ personality in order to remain friends. Snape probably went along with it.

Ignorance could be bliss.

Harry, on the other hand, would not be ignorant of Tom’s actions. He would know everything he could about the man. He pulled over his notebook that contained his research regarding Lord Thomas Slytherin and jotted down what had been revealed on the 21st.

It was nearly filled and he would have to charm some more pages into it soon. Harry flipped to the front and flicked through his notes, feeling like he was brushing up for a test when he got to the section that started his research into Tom Riddle and stopped.

Tom’s birthday was December 31st.

New Year’s Eve.

Was this a low-key birthday party? Should he get Tom a present?

Lord Slytherin’s birthday was recorded as the first of May. Did the inner circle know when his actual birthday was? Did anyone outside of himself and Tom know? What would you even get a soon-to-be king?

Harry tapped his quill on the edge of his desk and contemplated what to get a man who could have anything he wanted. Tom was a powerful and talented mage who could conjure anything and he had more than enough money to buy what he needed.

It was too early to put a bow on his head and say that he was going to be Tom’s present. Not that he would mind doing that. Harry grinned and his textbooks caught his eye.

Oh.

That could work.

He knew what he could get Tom.

Chapter End Notes

I’m going to aim for a biweekly chapter update but if I can I will do weekly. (woo!) Thanks a million for the comments! They keep me going! (umm what do you think of indents? Is it too much combined with the line breaks?)
Harry hurried through Knockturn Alley occasionally glancing around. It wasn’t the first time he had been down the alley but his father had managed to instill fear and mistrust of the place into him that made him slightly nervous to traverse the street. He brushed past the man with the singing lumps and the toenail witch, nearly upsetting her tray.

His fist closed around the prize stuck firmly into the bottom of his robe pocket. It had cost him a fair number of galleons and it might be a little over the top but it was the only thing Harry could think of to get *His (likely soon to be) Royal Highness*. His thumb ran over the smooth surface and he smiled.

The shopkeeper had been suspicious, since James Potter was a well-known auror and Harry was near identical to his father, and thought it might have been a sting.

It wasn’t like what he was buying was illegal.

Much.

As he neared the entrance to Diagon alley a familiar face caught his eye. Now, just what was Regulus doing in Borgin and Burkes? The Black family had a long-standing feud with the Burkes. Something to do with a bad loan and a ruined marriage if Harry remembered correctly.

Harry stepped into a side alley, donned his invisibility cloak and reemerged, the only evidence of his existence was the faint impressions of foot prints in the snow.

With a flick of his wand he cast a silencing charm on the door since Regulus was facing away and Borgin and/or Burke was in the back room. Harry entered the store and looked around the store. Harry had only had the chance to see it from the street in the past, and was relishing finally being within the notorious store. All of the items in the store seemed to cast a heavy aura of darkness around them; an opal necklace laid on a shelf behind a plate of glass; several eerie looking paintings hung on the walls, their subjects sleeping; and in front of Regulus, a beautiful black vase that looked like it had been broken and then fixed with gold.

Harry wondered if there were any objects in here were not cursed, and what magical properties they held, and how they even ended up in Borgin and Burkes. So many interesting stories that he would never have a chance to find out.

As he browsed the selection Harry grew slightly concerned that nothing seemed to have a price tag. He was unlikely to ever purchase anything from here now that he knew. This was the kind of place that if you had to ask the price, you couldn’t afford their cheapest product. Harry continued to peruse the store while watching Regulus out of the corner of his eye.

Burke, a member of the Sacred 27, came from the back room with a box and looked down his nose at Regulus, “The vase? 100 galleons. Take it to the goblins if you want the curse broken. We won’t do it for you.”

Harry bit down a whimper at the price. What in Merlin’s name did Regulus want with the damn thing?

Regulus nodded and began counting out the money, his lips pressed into a thin line and his eyes
uncaring about Burke’s behavior. Harry had a hard time believing that Regulus and Sirius were even related sometimes, they could be so different; but Gryffindor’s will be brash and Slytherin’s will be closed off.

Once Burke had taken the money he wrapped the vase with somnus paper, an expensive spelled tissue that could negate a touch based curse for a small amount of time, and placed it in the box he had brought from the back room.

The damn thing was lovely but what did Regulus want with it? Grimmauld Place was loaded with cursed objects, it wasn’t like the Black family needed anymore.

The silence in the room was palpable and Harry was worried they would be soon hear his breathing when Burke broke the silence, “How are you going to be voting during Conclave?”

Regulus looked up, his eyes widening for a second before narrowing, “I am uncertain. I suspect that Lord Slytherin will take the throne whether I like it or not.”

“He will obey us. The Sacred 27 will put him on the throne and we can remove him like Queen Imogen. It’ll get us the respect we rightfully deserve.” Burke muttered.

Harry raised an unseen eyebrow at that comment. Most members of the Sacred 27 already had some amount of respect and were not aching for more by controlling a king. Although, Burke was one of the few family lines that had lost their ancestral fortune and was forced to work like a “filthy commoner,” Draco’s words, not Harry’s, and tended to use their influence in Conclave assemblies to attempt to regain power or throw their weight around.

Tom likely wouldn’t even have to attempt to use any influence on Burke to get what he wanted.

Regulus remained silent as Burke gave him his receipt and wandered into the back room. After watching where the man had walked off to for what seemed to be a full minute, he turned on his heel and left the shop.

Harry ducked through the door behind him, whipped off his invisibility cloak and stuffed it in his pocket.

“Reguuumuuuus.” Harry said in a sing-song voice from behind him and skipped forward to greet him.

Regulus turned quickly, his dark curls flinging around to the front of his face, “Harry? What are you doing down here?” He wasn’t scolding, merely curious, it was a part of Regulus that Harry was fond of in comparison to his brother.

Sirius would rather die than take Harry near anything dark. Where was the fun in being a rule breaker if you didn’t break the rules and let children play with dark and cursed artifacts? He was no fun at all.

“Shopping. You?” Harry answered.

“Same. Have you had lunch? I was going to stop at Pemberton’s for a bite.” Regulus said with a wave of his hand, gesturing for Harry to join him.

They walked companionably in silence out of Knockturn Alley, down Diagon alley and into one of the twisty side street’s that were stuffed with niche shops and private clubs. At the end of Lyter Alley was a white building with an black door with gold filigree on it. There was no name or anything that could reveal what the building was except for the letter “P”, engraved on the door in a gothic typeface.
Regulus knocked three times in three different spots.

A wizened house elf opened the door, glanced at Regulus and bowed. Harry was given a cold glare, “Come in Master.” It croaked and moved aside for them to enter. Must be realted to Kreacher.

Pemberton’s wouldn’t be called famous but it was known as one of the most difficult private clubs to gain membership to. Hardly any halfbloods were admitted as members; they either had to have so much money Pemberton’s had asked them to join (very rarely) or they had paid to have a new history made for themselves, disavowing their halfblood past. Halfbloods could enter as guests but it was frowned upon. Maybe Regulus would get a sternly worded letter later.

Muggleborns were probably hexed for coming within ten meters of the door.

Sirius had once mentioned that he and Regulus had been signed up as members when they were born and Orion Black had begun to take them starting a few years before they would attend Hogwarts.

Sirius had hated it.

The silent purebloods who merely sat there and read the variety of newspapers available in an effort to avoid being at home with their families. The complete and utter dislike for anything outside of their traditional views and discussing their desires to wipe out muggles and muggleborns.

Well, that’s what Sirius had said and Harry was inclined to believe him, in this case.

The dining room they were lead into had a scattering of small circular tables that could seat a two people and it wasn’t silent like Sirius had claimed. There was a low susurrus through the room and Harry suspected that a young Sirius had considered this to be pure silence.

Noisy shit that his godfather was.

Regulus weaved through the room towards a table near the fireplace and sat down in a cushy red chair and Harry sat across from him and took in everything he could. It was likely this would be the only time he would be in Pembertons after all.

The room with dark and only lit by a large window and the fireplace they were next to. The unlit chandeliers were silver and with small crystals hanging from them, catching the flicker of the fire place. The dark oak paneled walls were covered with paintings of former notable Pemberton patrons on the walls, most of them, thankfully, sleeping. There were a few other members in the room but only one of them was a head of a family. Outside of Regulus that was.

Harry had had enough interactions with Marcus Flint to consider him an acquaintance but he didn’t really know much about his father outside the peerage books. The man had become a recluse after the death of his wife shortly after Marcus had been born.

Apparently, he stayed out of sight at Pemberton’s.

“I am going to suggest the venison,” Regulus said, picking up and flicking through a menu, “How was your evening with Lord Slytherin?” Regulus wasn’t looking directly at him but Harry knew he was watching for a reaction.

“It was pleasant enough,” Harry replied nonchalantly, also looking through the menu, “I must say that you vanished fairly early in the evening. I had been hoping to talk to you.”

“Oh, I was there. Alas, with the political climate and being the de facto head of House Black; there
are many back-room meetings that I must attend. I apologize we weren’t able to speak.”

Harry tried not to laugh at Regulus’ more formal attitude but they were surrounded by other high society members, “Not an issue, Lord Black.” He tapped the lunch he wanted on the menu and smiled blandly.

“I would love to be nosy about your relationship with Lord Slytherin but I imagine you will be fielding that question fairly often. I am not going to warn you away from him, nor will I preach his virtues. I trust that you will be able to keep your head above water.”

Harry smiled, “Thank you for your vote of confidence.”

“The only thing I would advise is to maybe avoid sucking upon any appendage of his in public.” Regulus smirked lecherously.

Harry stared hard at the fireplace, the back of his neck growing hot, “Saw that huh?”

“I did. I also saw Lord Slytherin look a bit surprised by something you said. Not hard to figure out what you may have proposed.”

Their food appeared in front of them and they began to eat in silence. Harry wasn’t ready for the gentle ribbing of a fellow Slytherin. He had prepared himself for the insanity of his parents and Sirius.

“. . . I may have had a bit to drink.” Harry admitted.

“Obviously. You should pace yourself better.” Regulus said, absentmindedly tapping his fork on the edge of his plate, “. . . Are you going to the event on New Year’s?”

Harry nodded, “I am. You?”

“Yes. I believe I was a last-minute addition though. Lord Slytherin has been attempting to woo me as of late.”

“Still on the fence?” Harry asked. Was Regulus just playing this line with everyone or was he actually on the damn fence? Regulus was decisive and the vote was just over a month away. There was no way he hadn’t already chose what way he was going to vote.

“Fairly. I suspect I will be talking with Lord Slytherin about my vote on the 31st. . . I would like some affirmation from him.”

“. . . Are you worried that Sirius may try to act?” This was a question that had been in the back of Harry’s mind for a while. Some issues were close to his godfathers heart and one of the big ones was his hatred of the nobility.

“That he might try to act as the Head of the Family?” Regulus leaned back and considered it, “Honestly, I had never considered the prospect. He has constantly shunned all responsibility when it comes to the Wizengamot or Conclave. He wasn’t officially disowned but I do believe if he attempted to do so my solicitor could argue that he is not fit to vote. No experience.”

Harry nodded, “Do you think Burke will vote for Lord Slytherin?” The conversation he overhead in the shop certainly seemed to point that way.

Regulus gave him a smile that was anything from amused and cast a quick muffling charm around them, “I don’t know. Members of the Sacred 27 have a long-standing agreement to not discuss who
voted for what but Burke tends to vote with his business in mind. He may also opt to sell his vote.
He has done so in the past.”

“To be a fly on the wall during next conclave. . .” Harry muttered.

“If Lord Slytherin becomes king you may have the opportunity to attend in the future.”

Harry stopped mid bite and looked at Regulus, only the Sacred 27 were permitted inside of a
conclave. The king would obviously be allowed in as their leader but to allow anyone else in was
unheard of, “Why?”

“Advisers have been welcome in the past.”

Harry sat back and stared blankly at a painting, it stared back.

“Interesting.”

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Ink dripped on his transfiguration homework as Harry struggled to find the correct phrase to describe
the process of changing a spread-out liquid back into a solid without it losing density. Why did he
have to explain it? You used your damn wand and said the words. That was all that needed to be
done, but noooo, McGonagall wanted explanations and theories. Thirty inches over break on this
one subject that no one would ever worry about because they would just vanish the damn liquid
instead of transfiguring it into a solid.

McGonagall certainly liked to punish her NEWT level students.

Harry was glad that he hadn’t been sorted into Gryffindor, she was much too strict and seemed
unapproachable even to members of her own house. After Harry had told Hermione about Professor
Vector’s biweekly visits to deal with any issues; Hermione had confided that she had only seen
McGonagall in the Gryffindor common room twice over the last six and a half years. Being the
deputy Headmistress and a head of house was probably too hard for one person and her house
suffered for it.

At least their quidditch team had a few good years when the Weasley girl was made seeker and the
Weasley twins were the beaters. That was four tough years for the Slytherin Quidditch team.

He stared at the slowly spreading ink blot on his parchment, fighting himself to do the damn work
and stop thinking about arbitrary subjects. He had decided to work on the damn paper on Christmas
day in order to make time go faster as he waited for Remus to show up. It was time to be responsible.

It was time to get back to work and be good and get good grades and be an amazing NEWT level
student.

Harry moaned and grabbed his hair, tugging it. It was so boring!

A muffled crack of apparition sounded outside the house and Harry snapped his head up to look out
the window. Through the flurry of snowflakes, he could see the salt and pepper hair of his favorite
uncle approaching the house.

Harry ran out of his room, paper forgotten, and jumped down to the landing just as the front door
opened letting in a cold draft, and a scruffy werewolf.

“Moony!” He exclaimed and wrapped his arms around the slender man, giving him a tight hug.
Harry tried not to think about how thin Remus felt as the older man hugged him back. He needed some high calorie food and by Merlin he was going to get it tonight.

“Harry! It’s good to see you. Happy Christmas!” Remus said cheerfully.

“I’ve missed you.” Harry responded, still not releasing him from the hug, “I was worried you weren’t going to be able to come.”

“Like I would miss Christmas with my favourite Slytherin!” Remus said, patting his back.

“I’m the only Slytherin you know.” Harry chuckled and released him finally, letting him take off his shoes and outer robe.

“Not true. I know Regulus and all the ones I went to school with.”

They walked into the living room together; Harry sitting in his favourite chair and Remus on the couch near the fireplace. “They don’t count. It has to be someone you consider a friend, and Regulus is only Sirius’ little brother. You barely know him.”

“Fine, fine! I am here to spend Christmas with my family which happens to include the best Slytherin out there. Better?”

Harry nodded and leaned back into the chair, getting comfortable, “Much. How’s the new job going?”

Remus shrugged, “Pretty good. Hopefully I will be able to keep it.”

“Any issues with your lycanthropy?” Harry wondered what Tom’s opinion on werewolf legislation was. It had better be in line with his own.

“None, so far. I took your advice and said that I need the days of full moon to care for my mother who was, sadly, bitten by a werewolf.” Remus gave him a small smile, it had only taken three years for the man to take his advice.

“Lies wrapped in partial truths are the best.” He glanced at Remus, a large smile on his face, “Not that I lie. I never lie. I always tell the truth just like all other Slytherin’s. We’re known as the house of truth tellers.” Harry nodded earnestly, his eyes wide and bright like a first year seeing Hogwarts for the first time.

Remus and Harry stared at one another for close to a full minute before they couldn’t contain their mirth and burst out laughing. Remus, holding his knees; and Harry, crying as they cackled at the sheer absurdity of it.

“I doubt veritaserum would even work on you.” Remus said, after a moment, sitting up but still giggling.

Harry wiped the tears from his eyes, “Let’s not test that theory. Ever. I don’t think anyone would survive.”

“It’s illegal to drug someone with veritaserum anyways. Hello Remus,” Lily said, entering the room with a tray of hot chocolate, “Unless you’re in the DMLE. Let’s hope your father never decides you need to tell the truth.” She winked at him.

“Why do you think I always wait for you to eat first when dad makes dinner?” Harry smirked and took his cup of cocoa and pointedly waited until Remus had taken a sip, “But as to the illegality of
veritaserum. . . the people who will are using it in a criminal endeavor know they are breaking the law and likely do not care. That’s the amazing thing about criminals; no regards for the law.” He shook his head sadly, “It’s a shame. If only they didn’t break the law they would be law abiding citizens. Moral and upstanding people, but now. They throw their lives away to become criminals. Always on the hunt for the next crime to commit.”

“No need to be like that,” She smiled and sat next to Remus on the couch, “Should I be worried about you trying to use veritaserum on Lord Slytherin? Get all his dirty little secrets?”

“Drug Thomas? I think not. There are much more deserving targets. People who need to let a little truth into their lives.” He was definitely not thinking of Rita Skeeter. How he wanted to know how she got her information. Harry was loath to admit that she may be better than him. Although, he did prefer to get all the information before acting on it.

Remus raised an eyebrow, “You would use veritaserum on someone?”

“If it was just me? No.” Harry scoffed.

Remus and Lily exchanged a dark look, “Why not?” Lily asked.

“I’ve never done a memory charm.” Harry answered as if it explained everything.

“. . . and?” Remus prompted.

“I’d want someone who is familiar with obliviation to do that for me so I wouldn’t turn my victim into a vegetable. Most people can overlook lost time, they can’t overlook a new member of the Janus Thickey ward.”

Lily frowned, “And if you were able to obliviate people you would use veritaserum on them?”

“Whoa, whoa,” Harry raised his hands up, “Before we get too far with assumptions; this is a theoretical conversation about how I would theoretically use veritaserum. As it is, I doubt I would have any reason to use it on someone. Only a life or death situation would be acceptable and there are much better methods then brewing a finnicky potion. I do have morals.” He said, sounding hurt by the insinuation.

“You do?” Sirius’ voice boomed from the hallway and he appeared in the living room, a bottle of butterbeer in one hand and James Potter in the other, “Did you like your present?”

“I did. Do Fred and George have any merchandise left?” Sirius had given him a large set of pranking supplies from the Weasley twins called the Motherlode, which had picture of Mrs. Weasley yelling and holding a rolling pin up like she was about to hit the person with the camera.

“I should hope so.” Sirius went to sit next to Remus but ended up sitting on Lily, “Extra squishy couch today.” He said and wiggled his butt down.

“Sirius. . .” Lily said in a low voice.

“. . . Padfoot you should move.” Said James who stood in the doorway, watching as his best friend leaned back into his wife.

“Why? This is my spot.” He said innocently.

There was a grunt from Lily and Sirius was on the floor, his face colliding on Harry’s foot.
“No dogs on the couch.” Lily gumbled and moved to the chair next to Harry’s, “James, control your pet.”

Sirius whimpered, his face still pressed into Harry’s foot, “Owww.”

“As much as I enjoy the sensation of someone kissing my feet, I must insist you get up.” Harry said and lifted his foot as well as Sirius’ head.

“You Potters are so cruel.” He pushed himself up and sat next to Remus, “The young one wants me to kiss his feet, the old one doesn’t care if I’m hurt and the lady one doesn’t like it when a handsome man sits on her. What did I do to deserve a family like this?” Sirius lamented and cuddled close to Remus.

“Got sorted into Gryffindor.” James answered and sat next to Sirius, “Do you want me to kiss your boo-boo better?”

Sirius nodded, his bottom lip sticking out, “Mmmhmm!”

“Where does it hurt?”

Harry watched Remus roll his eyes, “For Merlin’s sake.” He muttered.

“Right here,” Sirius pointed to his crotch, “Will you kiss it better?”

James bit his lip, his eyes twinkling, “I think not,” he did kiss the tip of Sirius’ nose, “Silly dog.”

A flash of green caught Harry’s attention and he turned to his mother, who sat next to him, one red brow raised up and her chin resting on her fist, “Do you see what I’ve had to deal with for over 25 years?”

“I’m still shocked that I exist. Just look at them,” Harry gestured to the marauders, “They’re hopelessly in love.”

“I’m pretty sure I was your father’s second choice when he found out they couldn’t marry each other without breaking a law.”

“A horrible law that should be removed from the books!” Sirius exclaimed, “And once it is I will Marry James and Remus and Lily!” He looked shyly around the room, “If they’ll have me that is.”

“No dogs in the bed.” Lily muttered but she was smiling at least.

“Maybe Harry can ask his new beau to remove that pesky law once he becomes king.” Sirius gave him a dirty grin.

“Damn.” Lily said and reached into her pockets and pulled out a pouch.

“What?” Sirius looked at her, concern etched in his handsome face, “What is it?”

Lily pulled out three galleons and passed them to Harry, “Five points from Gryffindor.” She said glaring at him.

“What did I do!”

“She bet that you would wait ten minutes before talking about Thomas. I thought it would be right away,” Harry smiled at his mother, “I guess we both learned something today.” He tucked the money into his pockets.
“I had no idea I had become so predictable. . . What have I become?” Sirius said and stared at the Christmas tree, his eyes glassy.

Remus chuckled and patted Sirius’ thigh, “It happens to the best of us. Did you and your mother bet on me?”

“No. You’re too polite to ask directly and are more likely to rely on Sirius asking or hearing the gossip later after I go to bed.”

“Ouch.”

“You’re passive in the way you get information. I can appreciate it.” Harry said.

“Skeeter is going to be out of a job if you end up working for the Prophet.” James muttered distractedly as he waved a hand in front of Sirius’ still glassy eyes.

“I’d be perfectly happy if Skeeter was out of a job and it wasn’t related to me. Her news is nothing but unsubstantiated gossip. I have sources.” Most of the time.

The room lulled into a silence, not entirely uncomfortable or uncomfortable with Sirius staring and James trying to lure his friend out of his silence.

“Well, I’m glad you like Lord Slytherin,” Remus said, “If you support him, I look forward to seeing what he does as King.”

Harry smiled, Tom better be agreeable to bettering the lives of werewolves, “Thank you Remus. Glad someone has some faith in me.”

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter will be the NYE party.

Was going to have it start in this chapter but it got a little... big.
Harry walked out of the fireplace and into the reception area of Riddle manor.

It was empty.

No one was present and no sound to be heard except the crackling of the fireplace behind him. Did Tom have a house elf?

Harry went deeper into the house and searched for any signs of life. The place was the same as last time except Bellatrix Lestrange wasn't standing over his shoulder. He pulled out and checked his pocket watch, he was on time and not fashionably late. For once.

The silence was quickly growing unnerving. And he felt uncomfortable with calling out for anyone. The opportunity to explore the house alone also helped on his decision to begin climbing the stairs to investigate Riddle manor.

He slowly and quietly climbed the stairs, looking out for anything that might be of interest. It was much more relaxing then last time when Bellatrix had led him Tom's office. The fear of being murdered had managed to override his natural inquisitiveness.

He stopped on the second-floor landing and was about to head down the hallway when a painting caught his eye; it was tucked into a dark corner and would have been easily overlooked had it not been for the flash of red as the subject turned to look at him. The frame was black, simple and unassuming; quite unlike the man painted in the picture.

It was Tom.

Well, it was Tom if Tom looked like he was in his fifties or sixties; black hair with white streaked throughout; a few wrinkles on his face but there was more that was just different. Things that were wrong and not how Tom was. The painting had inhumanely pale skin, so white that you could see the blue veins underneath; and the eyes, while red, were much different than the red eyes of the Tom Harry knew. They were slit, like a serpent. They were also cold. Filled with an undeniable air of hatred.

Why had Tom had such an unpleasant painting commissioned?

A chill hit him and the hairs on the back of his neck rose; the painting was observing him as he was observing it. It unsettled him.

"When were you painted?" Harry asked, hoping to break the tension he was suddenly feeling. He searched the canvas for a date or even a signature but could not locate one. It's eyes were burning into him and he really wished it would stop looking at his eyes like it was trying to use legilmency.

The Tom inside the painting cocked his head to the side and his face took a pinched off expression, "You're the Potter boy?"

Harry nodded, "And I assume that you are a painting of Tom that is more... age accurate."

The painting mirrored his nod, "What are you doing wandering around this house unaccompanied?"
It asked curtly, his eyes narrowed and a small sneer formed on his thin lips.

Harry rocked back on his heels and raised his head up, looking down his nose at the painted Tom. "I was invited. It is your counterparts' birthday and I came to celebrate."

The painting's lips pressed into a white slash across his face, "He's in the study, first door on the left. Don't keep him waiting." He said dismissively and went to leave the frame. Surely to tell Tom that Harry was present.

"You didn't answer my question. When were you painted? I know he's about seventy and you look to be fifty to sixty." Harry pressed.

"I see they still do not teach mathematics at Hogwarts. I suggest you take a class to learn how to subtract twenty from seventy." The painting snapped and walked out of frame, his robes billowing behind him dramatically.

Harry sighed and looked at the now empty frame. Now, that the other Tom was gone from it he could see the background. It was a landscape painting of a beach at night, heavy waves crashing against a cliff face in the distances and no real room for a portrait to actually be in the foreground.

The older Tom did not belong to this painting.

"Bugger." Harry muttered and finally turned towards the hallway. Did Tom use paintings to watch people? It wouldn't surprise Harry if that was the case, he had done so himself in the past.

It did seem risky to have a painting of an older version of Tom, even if it couldn't be confirmed. How many people knew that Tom was not as he appeared? His real age? If anyone asked he could just claim it to be a painting of his late father but it seemed reckless.

Well, if Tom didn't have people come over often it wasn't that much of an issue. If all went well on February 2nd Tom would be moving into Lansdowne palace. He could just leave the painting here.

Harry knocked on the study door and pushed it open before receiving a response, Tom sat at his desk, a quill in one hand and piece of parchment in the other. He didn't look up from the sheet, "Hello Harry, you look quite radiant today." His mouth twitched into a smile.

"And here I thought I would be coming to a lively party, but alas- I am alone. Just me and you." Harry said as he strode into the room and plopped down in the chair across from him.

Tom winked at him and lowered the quill to the sheet and made a few quick strokes, "I may have lied."

"A shocking turn of events. Lord Slytherin be untruthful? A shocking turn of events." Harry crossed his legs and smirked at Tom who had finally designed to look at him, "Shall I get Rita Skeeter? This is a scoop that she would love to have."

Tom raised an immaculately sculpted brow, his red eyes glinting with humour, "That's quite the tone. I do hope I didn't do anything to offend you."

Harry shook his head, "Nothing of the sort. I just enjoy being overly dramatic. I find it amusing. I assume you lied about the time the party starts."

"Correct. You're only twenty minutes early," Tom tapped the quill on the parchment and Harry spotted a series of runes written on the page, not that he could identify which runes they were. They weren't part of any runic language he had learned yet.
"Well, fortunately, I appreciate the deception. No awkward questions from your inner circle about this," Harry reached into his inside robe pocket and pulled out a small box, wrapped in silver and pushed it onto Tom's desk.

Tom stared blankly at the box for what seemed to be a full minute before he reached out, the tips of his long fingers catching on it and dragging it closer, "What is it?" His voice was a touch higher than usual, seemingly strained.

"A birthday present. I still have a few hours left, don't I?" Harry laced his fingers together behind his head and leaned back. A smug grin across his face. The unflappable Lord Slytherin was seemingly...flapped.

Tom lifted the small box, rotated it around as if he was trying to see what was inside, "I...Thank you." Tom opened a drawer and delicately placed the unopened box within. He turned away briefly, his normally calculating eyes, soft.

Harry frowned, he had wanted to see Tom's reaction. He could respect the choice to open an unexpected gift in private, to avoid anyone seeing your response, but he had wanted to see it.

He tried not to pout.

Sure, Harry did prefer to open presents in private, but he had darker inclined friends than his parents believed, and what's the point of getting a gift if it was going to be immediately taken away?

The room was quiet for a moment before Tom spoke up, his eyes taking in Harry's appearance, "Those robes are nice."

"They'd look even better on your floor." Harry responded instantly, his mouth running off at the speed of a Firebolt.

Tom's breath caught in his throat, and his eyes widened, "Have you already gotten into the wine?"

Harry mentally kicked himself. He couldn't help but come onto Tom, stupid handsome bastard. "I decided that it was best to keep my inhibitions tonight to avoid upsetting your friends."

Tom covered his mouth with his hand to hide a smirk, "If you have inhibitions then what was...that?"

"It appears when I am in your presence my inhibitions desert me." Harry retorted, his lips twisting up into a grin, "I'll try to be good when your friends are around."

"...If we had a bit more time I would happily take you up on that offer." Tom winked before pushing out of the chair and coming around the desk, "Those robes are more suited for the floor after all."

Tom held out his hand, "Thank you for coming tonight."

Harry bit down the urge to ask if that was a promise for later and merely took Tom's hand, "It's been my pleasure."

Tom pulled him up into a standing position, their bodies pressed up against one another, their hands clasped tightly between them. Tom's unnatural red eyes held Harry's own and a shudder of arousal travelled down his body. Harry took the initiative and leaned upwards, capturing Tom's lips in a kiss.

Tom's free hand travelled to the small of Harry's back, and pressed him closer. The other hand was quickly freed and he grabbed the hair at the base of Harry's neck, tilting the young Slytherin's head
as he deepened the kiss.

Harry's hands travelled along Tom's body, touching and grasping everything he could. They were so close that Harry could feel Tom's arousal pressed up against him, he was sure Tom could feel the same from him.

He became so lost in the sensation of Tom's warmth and touch that he barely noticed the back of his thighs hitting the edge of the desk. He didn't even realize he had been spun around.

Harry broke away from the kiss and took in Tom's disheveled state. His eyes were dilated and his breathing ragged, that perfectly coiffed hair was in such disarray he could be mistaken for a Potter.

Harry peeled off his robe, revealing a white dress shirt and pair of slacks beneath, "Are we doing this?" His voice was raw with need, "Because I want to do this and you need to remove some more of those damn clothes."

Tom licked his lips, before leaning in to kiss Harry again, it seemed almost chaste, "We don't have enough time for that. . ." Tom's hands travelled down and undid Harry's pants before sliding down to grasp his erection.

Harry moaned at the touch, "Oh fuck. . ."

"Not enough time at all. . ." Tom whispered before dropping to his knees and pushing Harry's pants around his thighs and quickly engulfing his shaft.

Harry gripped the edge of the desk tightly, his nails leaving indents on the antique oak as Tom continued his ministrations, "Oh god yes." The sight of this man, this politically and magically powerful man on his knees pleasuring him was almost too much to bear. Harry's head rolled back as Tom's head bobbed along his length.

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Tom pulled away, his hand holding the base of Harry's cock tight, "You like this?" His red eyes, half-lidded and filled with a burning lust.

"Fuck yes." Harry moaned as Tom began to stroke him " Fucking hell yes." Harry bucked his hips fruitlessly. He was already close.

"Now, Harry . . . behave." Tom whispered and slowly, painfully slowly swirled his tongue around the head of Harry's cock before engulfing his entire length. Tom gripped Harry's hips, his nails digging into the soft flesh, it was a pleasing dichotomy as Tom pleasured him, "Oh Merlin. . ." Harry whimpered and slowly entwined his fingers within Tom's soft black hair, tugging lightly as his head bobbed along his shaft.

Heat blossomed in his groin and his muscles began to tense, he was quickly passing the point of no return, "Tom . . . I'm going to. . ." He whispered, trying to give some sort of warning.

Harry had expected Tom to move away but instead he redoubled his efforts, Tom sped up, sucking on him hard. Harry gripped Tom's hair tightly and threw his head back, letting out a low satisfied groan as he orgasmed into the older man's mouth, "Oh god. Oh god. Oh god. Yes. Yes!" Harry continued, dropping off into incoherent mumbles.

Harry dropped his chin to his chest, his mind was foggy and unable to comprehend anything; not the pleased smile of Lord Slytherin; or the distant sound of someone downstairs. All he knew was that he felt deliciously spent and he wanted to return the favour now.

"Pull up your pants, dear." Tom said, patting his cheek as he walked behind the desk and pulled a
small mirror from a drawer.

In his dazed state, Harry slid his pants up over his hips and began to put his robe back on, "That... was... wow." He said, a lecherous smile on his face and a hungry glint in his eye, "Would you... like me to reciprocate? I want to reciprocate."

Tom smiled as he got his hair back under his control, "I will, regretfully, very regretfully, have to decline for the moment. We have guests." He walked from behind the desk and took a hold of Harry's face, his warm hands gripping him tenderly, and kissed him deeply. There was no battle for dominance, just harmony as they embraced.

Harry could taste himself on Tom's lips as they parted, "Later then."

Tom nodded and kissed him again briefly, "Yes."

Chapter End Notes

This one is a bit short because the next one is getting annoyingly large and I am still writing the damn thing.
Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It was a small, intimate gathering of his closer allies; ones he could trust to forge documents; ones he could trust to imperius, obliviate and kill anyone who got in his way. It wasn’t appropriate to call them his friends, though. He held himself above them. They couldn’t see him as someone who was approachable and on the same level as them. He wasn’t on the same level though; he was smarter, more talented and frankly, much more powerful than any of them.

He glanced over to the couch where Harry was sitting next to Bellatrix Lestrange, who was speaking to her cousin, Regulus. Not that Harry was paying any attention to them, his green eyes were locked onto him. Harry had had the gall to try to use a listening charm. It had bounced off his anti-eavesdropping spell and when Tom had glared he had received a cheeky grin. Completely shameless.

Tom couldn’t blame him for wanting to know what he and Lucius were discussing, the younger man had probably never seen the Malfoy patriarch be fearful before. Harry couldn’t hear the conversation but he could see it; Lucius was standing in front of him with his hands clenched at his sides, his head bowed so low he couldn’t even make eye contact as he spoke. Lucius Malfoy was proud, arrogant and in command of every situation, but now . . . it must be disconcerting seeing him like so.

“—and Fudge’s undersecretary has been blocking me from meeting him and I suspect has been preventing my owls from getting to him.”

“Imperius her. There will be some questionable deaths in the next month and we cannot have too much attention drawn to them. That woman is overly suspicious of my claim to the throne.”

Lucius bobbed his head, “Yes my Lord. My apologies for failing you.”

Tom firmly grasped Lucius’ chin and snarled, “See that it doesn’t happen again. Dumbledore got to him before you did and now we have the wizengamot in our way. Maybe I shall send Crouch to correct your errors.”

Cool grey eyes met his own, “I will not fail again. I assure you.”

“Good.” He responded.

Movement near Harry caught his eye and he watched Bellatrix try to get Harry’s attention. “Potter!”

Bellatrix snapped her fingers in front of Harry’s face, drawing his attention from Tom and Lucius.

“What?” Harry snapped his head around so fast his neck cracked.

Bellatrix wore a familiar lopsided grin, the one she wore when she was about to play with her victims, “Why does the Dark Lord tolerate you?”

“Bella!” Regulus exclaimed but was quickly silenced by a look from his cousin.

This would be interesting to see how this played out; nearly everyone in the room was involved in political games, but Harry was still in Hogwarts which could be much worse. It was where you built your circle, where you cultivated your connections and practiced for your future. At least after you graduated you could use much darker curses to end your disagreements.
Tom tried not to smile at the memory.

“I could ask the same of you,” Harry snapped, green eyes calculating as he scrutinized Tom’s favourite lieutenant “You have a well-known reputation for using dark magic, you’re impulsive with an abrasive personality, no votes in conclave or the wizengamot to speak of.”

Tom kept his face impassive but tried not to smile.

“You do have wealth, a fearsome reputation, looks, and the Lestrange brothers wrapped around your finger. But ultimately, I think that your negatives outweigh your positives of your usefulness to Lord Slytherin. You can only torture, bribe and maybe, if someone could overlook your wretched personality, seduce someone in an effort to help the cause. No one in their right mind will look at you and think “friend” and this is a game of delicate manipulations instead of blunt force. He needs a scalpel, not a sledgehammer.

“So, tell me Bella, why does the Dark lord tolerate you?” Harry smiled and took a long drink of wine before dropping the glass on the side table with a loud clunk.

The room was completely silent. Everyone had stopped what they were doing to listen to Harry lambaste her. Tom pinched the bridge of his nose and rolled his eyes upwards. This could get messy.

“You dare!” Bellatrix hissed, her hooded eyes burned with barely repressed fury as she inched towards him, her hunched form dementor-like.

“Oh, I dare,” Harry gave her an unimpressed look as she advanced, she was a mere two inches from his face, “What have you done with your life Bellatrix? You were married off and have been lashing out since it happened. You have nothing without your husband and I know it eats you away inside.” Harry’s expression grew soft, as did his voice, “You had all the advantages in life; wealth, nobility, beauty, you’re smart and talented but you still need a man to survive in this world. And here I sit a reasonably wealthy halfblood male from a light oriented family. I am not a member of the Sacred 27 and I would consider myself reasonably attractive but I still have more of an advantage than you. Poor Bellatrix... I have the Dark Lord’s attention despite not being a rich noble with dark inclinations and if you really wish to know why I am in his favour, I dare you to ask.” Harry leant forward, his nose brushing the tip of hers as he stared into her dark eyes, “I know my value to Lord Slytherin and if you trust him, you should not question his decisions.”

Bellatrix’s jaw set in a hard line and her eyes were diamond sharp as she looked to him.

Tom sighed internally.

Yes, Harry was going to have to earn his place within his inner circle but he really wished Harry had not chosen Bellatrix as his victim. Now he was responsible for damage control and the house elves tended to cry when they had to get blood out of the hardwood.

He looked down his nose at her, challenging her to question his decisions.

She shakily stood, her hands balled into tight fists as she approached. He had expected some enraged defiance in her but she fell to her knees with a loud thud, her head lowered in supplication, “My Lord... I apologize and beg your forgiveness. It is not my place to—”

“Dearest Bella,” he interrupted, “You are correct. It is not your place,” He reached down and lifted her chin, “but I am a forgiving Lord.” He looked from her to the room at large, “In the space of a few months Harry Potter managed to do what only one other had managed to do in the millennia since Hogwarts was built... He discovered the location of the Chamber of Secrets.”
Everyone in the room looked away from him to Harry, who was lounging on the couch, his green eyes twinkling as they reassessed their knowledge of him. Little annotations being made that increased his value in their minds. Even Lucius looked shaken by the revelation. The only person whose expression did not change was Severus.

Tom stretched his neck and languidly gestured to Harry, “A halfblood with a vendetta uncovered a secret that had been passed down in my family for generations. I would have been impressed if he had uncovered it over the seven years he had been attending Hogwarts but he found it in a few short months!” Tom let out a single bark of laughter, “Only a descendant of the great Salazar himself could open the Chamber, so imagine my surprise when I received a message where he detailed the entrance and contents of the Chamber as well as photographic proof.”

Every eye was on him, shocked by his words, “How could I not have him at my side? I desire only the best,” He gestured to the occupants of the room, “and I have the best.” Tom took a wine glass and raised it to the occupants of the room before taking a sip.

The room was quiet for a moment before Bellatrix broke the silence, “We are honoured by your words, My Lord.” She said, rising to her feet and bowing low, “I see where I was mistaken and beg your forgiveness. I shall not do so again.

Tom reached forward and stroked her cheek, his thumb beneath her eye which was slightly damp, “We will discuss it later. Go get yourself cleaned up.” He commanded and she left the room, her back straight, shoulders squared, but her eyes slightly red rimmed.

Tom turned back to Lucius and recast their privacy ward, and immediately a susurrous of whispers filled the room.

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The spot next to Harry dipped as Regulus sat next to him and cast their own privacy ward, “Are. You. Insane?” Regulus’ grey eyes bored into his own, worry etched into his handsome face.

“I knew what I was doing,” Harry responded glibly, turning to him, “Do you know what you’re doing?”

Regulus frowned, “What are you talking about?”

Harry turned his wine glass around, watching as it caught the light, “I can’t figure it out. . . You’ve been keeping yourself uninvolved with Lord Slytherin for the last year and you claimed to be uncertain about voting for him, but here you are today, with his inner circle. You say he’s attempting to woo you, but I have yet to see him speak to you. Are you already working with him or. . . Just what is going on?” Harry asked. He couldn’t put his finger on Regulus’ actions and it was bothering him immensely.

Regulus sat up straight, his lips in a thin line, “Harry. . .” He sighed heavily and looked skyward, “We can talk about it later.”

“I want to talk about it now.” Harry demanded.

“Too bad.” Regulus snapped and stood up, “Don’t get yourself killed by Bellatrix,” he warned, tugged his robes into place and walked over to Severus and Livia Zabini.

Harry sighed and ran his fingers through his hair. Challenging Bellatrix had been stressful, but ultimately worth it. He clenched his hands tightly to stop them from shaking.
Tom was sending him glances every now and then.

Harry was wondering when they would have a chance to speak again tonight when the couch once again dipped under someone’s weight.

Harry looked to the man sitting next to him, he was tall and lean with slicked back hair and intense brown eyes; Barty Crouch Jr.

Tom had warned him to stay away from him.

Crouch didn’t say anything, he just looked at him.

Harry cocked his head to the side and smiled. “You really take after your mother.” He said, “You have your fathers colouration but that’s it.”

Crouch raised a brow at his statement, “Not going to publicly eviscerate me?”

Harry snorted, “You came to me for that? You must be a masochist. No, I will not eviscerate you. I don’t know enough about you for that,” he shrugged, “But that was the only thing I could think to compliment you on.”

“Compliment me for looking like my mother?” Crouch laughed, “And how in Merlin’s name did you determine that? What if I hate my mother?”

Harry grinned mischievously, he was in his element now, “Your father is head of the DMLE. He dislikes dark magic passionately but you’re here in the presence of a Dark Lord, you clearly don’t hold with your father’s views. He doesn’t know what your inclination is since he is a stubborn, arrogant, inflexible toerag who would disown you in an instant and I would have heard about that. Your family is not notably wealthy, in comparison to some,” He inclined his head towards Lucius Malfoy, “so you are forced to work for your money and don’t have to leech off him which would be one of the few reasons to stay in contact with the man.

Harry took another drink of wine, finishing it off, “So, I believe you have not revealed your true colours to your father, not because you care for him as he is completely unlovable, but because you care for your mother and if you were disowned he would prevent you from seeing her.”

Crouch watched him for a moment before quietly declaring, “I can see why the Dark Lord wanted you.”

Harry inclined his head, “Thank you. I assume that I was correct.”

“Completely,” Barty grinned, “Tell me Harry... How is your knowledge of the Dark Arts?”

“Theoretical.” Harry quipped instantly and winked “Auror father who hates dark magic. I’m certain you can understand.”

The older man let out a bark of laughter, pulling attention back to the couch, “How right you are!”

Harry chuckled and sat up, he had no idea why Tom had warned him away from Barty, he could feel their personalities clicking already, “Why do you ask?”

“I teach people the dark arts. Maybe, I can teach you.” Barty said almost breathlessly.

Harry sobered up a small bit at that. He didn’t know if he was ready to travel down that path. There was a time he wanted to learn the dark arts to spite his father but in the last two years he had grown
more uncertain about using magic to harm people. He wasn’t a fan of causing others to suffer.

Much.

“Well, it’d have to be after I’ve graduated. . . I’m heading back up to Hogwarts on the 2\(^{nd}\).” Harry said quietly.

“I’ll speak to the Dark Lord about it. He might prefer to teach you himself.” Barty said cheerfully and shifted closer, their legs touching, and whispered conspiratorially, “I would have never believed he was that powerful unless I had seen it, felt it, myself. I have been studying the dark arts for years but his power leaves me without words. . . if you are given the chance to learn from him,” Barty’s hand gripped Harry’s thigh painfully, “\textit{take it.}\n
Harry shuddered at the intensity of Barty’s command, “I. . . I will.” He nodded.

“Barty.” Tom stood in front of them, his red eyes focused on Barty’s hand.

Crouch removed the offending hand like it had been burned, “My Lord, how may I be of service?” He stood and bowed.

“I need to speak to you in my study. I have an assignment for you.” Tom’s tone was glacial.

Barty nodded and the two walked out of the room.

Harry glanced around and saw that no one was looking in his direction, he pulled out and donned his invisibility cloak before followed them upstairs and into the study. Slipping into the room just before Barty closed the door.

Tom sat behind his desk and Barty across from him, where Harry had been sitting a few hours ago. Harry didn’t move closer inside the study, and settled between a set of bookcases, unseen and hopefully, unheard.

“Slughorn is opposed to the monarchy; Burke has already sold his vote and unfortunately made a contract with the buyer, he cannot break it; Shafiq is refusing to respond; and Lucius is in the middle of negotiations with Selwyn.” Tom said without preamble.

“Regulus will be voting in our favour?”

Tom nodded, “Yes. Potter working with us is what finally drew him over.”

“Taking Shafiq and Selwyn out of the equation. . . that leaves you with 13 votes to 12. It’s tight. Will Lucius manage to get Selwyn?”

Tom nodded, his fingers laced together and his brow furtive, “Unless something unforeseen occurs we will have Selwyn. I suspect Shafiq will vote against me.”

Barty was silent for a moment, his eyes pensive, “My Lord, what is it you require of me? I will do anything you ask of me.” His voice was low and eager.

Tom’s red eyes settled on Barty and he smiled, “I need the Crouch vote. You \textit{must} take your fathers place in Conclave by February 2\(^{nd}\).”

“Your will be done.” Barty rose from his seat and bowed, “I thank you for this opportunity to prove my loyalty to you, my Lord. I \textit{truly} thank you.”

Tom inclined his head, “You may leave.”
“Thank you, my Lord.” Barty bowed once again and left the room, a skip in his step.

Harry was following close behind, ready to sneak out after his impromptu eavesdropping, when the doors slammed shut with a loud bang, “I may not be able to see you but I can sense you.” Tom said accusingly.

“Damn.” He whispered and pulled the cloak off. A sheepish smile on his lips.

Red eye’s bored into his, “If you were anyone else I would be forced to punish you for eavesdropping on my conversation. . . but I wanted you for your information gathering abilities. . . I imagine this is the price I must pay for your inquisitiveness.” Tom said, humour leaked into his firm tone.

Harry stood there for a moment before he walked behind the desk and sat himself firmly on Tom’s lap, “And here I thought you wanted me for my young nubile body.”

Tom exhaled through his nose, “It certainly doesn’t hurt. . .” a hand travelled up Harry’s leg and settled on his thigh, stroking it, “but I must ask that you refrain from provoking Bellatrix in the future.”

“I will treat her with the utmost respect,” Harry leaned in, his lips brushing Tom’s ear, “. . . My Lord.”

Tom shuddered beneath him at that one simple phrase and it was delicious. Harry loved that he had the same effect on Tom that Tom had on him; that he could make the normally apathetic man beneath him quiver with pleasure.

The grip on his thigh tightened, “You are really testing my ability to not take you on this desk right now.” Tom’s lovely red eyes were smoldering with the intensity of his desire.

Harry lowered his head and kissed Tom, entangling his fingers in his hair as he deepened the embrace, pulling him closer and shifting his legs so he was straddling the older man beneath him, “How close are you to throwing caution to the wind?” He asked in a breathy whisper.

A pair of hands gripped his backside tightly, the fingers digging into his flesh through his robe and pants, “Very.” Tom’s voice was ragged.

“Good,” Harry began to unbutton Tom’s robes, his fingers deftly moved down, exposing Tom’s chest, “You have a lovely neck. . .” He nibbled along the edge of Tom’s jaw, before delving down to suck on the flesh at the base of his neck, “Why do you cover it with all of those high collars? It’s a crime to hide all this beautiful skin away. . .”

Tom tilted his head, to receive more of Harry’s ministrations, “You shouldn’t be so good at that. . .” He began to work at removing Harry’s robe.

A loud knock rang throughout the room and they stopped, Harry’s hand midway down Tom’s robe and Tom with both hands on the lapels of Harry’s robes about to rip the younger man’s clothes off.

“Who is it?” Harry whispered, knowing Tom could tell through the wards.

“Severus.” Tom responded with a growl, “Get under the desk.” He gently began to push Harry off his lap and into the tight space under the desk.

Tom flicked his wand and his robe returned to its previously tidy appearance, “Enter.”
Harry bit back a chuckle at the crack in Tom’s voice.

“Lord Slytherin,” Severus said as he entered the room, walking quickly to the desk and sitting down across from him, “I am concerned.”

“What is it?” Tom demanded.

“The Potter boy... I have not seen him nor Bellatrix. I find that... worrying.” Snape’s voice was strained, as if it hurt him to say this.

“Bellatrix is in a guest room and Potter is nearby.” Tom answered curtly.

Harry, feeling rather mischievous, slid his hand under Tom’s robe and towards his groin. Tom failed to react except for a slight dilation of his pupils as Harry slowly began to undo his pants.

“I have unfortunately been familiar with James Potter for many years now... and I am frankly concerned by his son’s rash actions tonight. He acted more like his father than the intelligent Slytherin he supposedly is.” Snape drawled.

Tom rested his chin on his fist, “I know it’s been a few years since you’ve had to deal with social niceties and power dynamics, but you surely understood why that had to happen tonight.”

Harry paused to listen, his hand rubbing against Tom’s groin.

“There were much more... sane people to assert dominance over.”

Harry smiled in the darkness of the desk. He had been ready to go after any and all occupants of the room. Bellatrix had just been the first to try to attack him.

“What is done is done. Is there anything else? I am a bit pre-occupied.” Tom pressed.

“No, my Lord.” Snape’s chair moved back with a loud scrape that surprised Harry with the volume and abruptness of it.

He jumped slightly, hitting his head on the top of the desk.

Both Snape and Tom went perfectly still. Harry could only imagine the looks they were exchanging. He could imagine it; Snape was probably stone faced but with mild panic in his eyes for catching his Lord in a compromising situation.

“Ow. My toe.” Tom said in a strangled tone.

Harry began to shake with repressed mirth and was close to casting a silencing spell on himself. No one would ever buy that excuse; not even a half asleep, imperiused Cornelius Fudge who was suffering from a concussion.

“I—I—We can speak at a later time my Lord.” Snape stuttered and practically fled the room. The doors closed behind him with a bang, followed by a soft click as they were locked.

Harry crawled out from under the desk, on overly amused grin on his face, “Do you think he’s outside crying? I think he is.”

Tom hadn’t moved his chin from his fist, “I don’t think you are aware of just how unsettled you made him. I don’t think I’ve ever seen Severus run. I didn’t even know he could run.”

“I help you uncover all sorts of things about your followers...” Harry said and resumed his stripping
of the Dark Lord, “But enough about them. . . It’s your birthday and we need to celebrate it.” He grasped the edges of the robes and ripped them apart with abandon, buttons flew across the room with a clatter. Tom’s chest was exposed and Harry climbed to his feet and spread his hands across his chest, exploring the soft flesh that was shockingly littered with scars. Tom eyed him warily, as if waiting for a negative reaction as Harry looked at each of them in detail. His fingers lightly brushing against the raised flesh that denoted where he had experienced cuts, burns, and, in one case, a bite.

Harry leaned down and kissed a small angular scar just below his collarbone and began to travel downwards, placing delicate kisses on a new scar each time. He stopped just below Tom’s belly button, his cheek pressed against the sparse hair that lead down to Tom’s groin.

He watched intently as Harry pulled Tom’s length from his trousers and slowly engulfed him, as Harry reached the base his green eyes locked onto Tom’s. A flickering of legilimency from Tom told him everything he needed to know; Tom was infatuated and this was driving him close to a loss of control.

He shuddered and entangled his hands in Harry’s hair, holding it loosely as Harry bobbed his head up and down his shaft. Harry loved feeling Tom trying to exert a bit of control over him but failing to do so as Harry continued at his own speed.

“You are a menace to my self-control.” Tom muttered.

Harry stopped, Tom still in his mouth and he gripped the base of his shaft firmly and remained still. Red eyes glared down at him for a moment before attempting to push Harry’s head down.

He let out a small snort of amusement before swallowing him completely, bobbing his head up and down for nearly a minute he pulled away, gasping for lungful’s of air, and wiping his lips. . . . Apparently, I need oxygen to live.” He said before Tom roughly grabbed the front of his robes, pulled him close and kissed him. Harry was practically being held up by his robes, unable to get his feet firmly planted on the floor as Tom ravaged his mouth.

Tom sat him on the desk and began to strip Harry of his clothes without breaking their embrace. Harry pushed Tom’s robes off completely, gaining a tight grip on the older man’s back, tightly coiled muscles beneath his fingers. Harry shuddered, Tom’s erection was pressed between them and it only made him harder.

“You are entirely over-dressed.” Tom growled and ripped Harry’s shirt off before attacking his neck, hands working at removing Harry’s trousers.

A loud moan escaped Harry’s lips as his pants slid down and off, freeing his erection from its confines. Harry pressed closer to him and whispered, “I want you. . .”

“Good,” was Tom’s guttural response right before he swept everything off the desk and roughly spun Harry around, pressed his chest against the desk, his backside completely exposed. One hand was pressed between his shoulder blades, holding him in place as the other carefully explored, soft delicate touches giving him goosebumps, “So lovely. . .” he whispered.

Tom pressed against Harry, kissed his neck briefly before brushing his lips against his ear, “I want to fuck you right now. Let me know now if you have any uncertainties.”

The tone of Tom’s voice, the desperate need conveyed within gave Harry shivers. “Tom,” he said as firmly as possible, turning his head as much as he could to look at the older man, “I am completely certain that I want you right now and if you don’t do anything soon I will hex you.”
He couldn’t see Tom’s face but he did hear the chuckle, “As you wish.” The hand between his shoulder blades was lifted and Harry remained there motionless, his erection weeping openly beneath him.

“Relax,” Tom muttered and began to press a lubricated digit into him, stretching him out slowly.

“This isn’t my first time riding a broom,” Harry muttered, a shiver wracking him as Tom added another finger.

“It’s not?” Tom paused, surprised.

Harry let out an undignified whimper that he would deny to his dying breath, “Tom! We can discuss it later!” he snapped and rocked and rubbed his hips backwards onto his fingers. He needed release.

Tom chuckled again and pressed his hand into the small of Harry’s back and continued to stretch him until he felt Harry was ready, “. . . If we must.” Tom pressed against him, rubbing his back slowly.

Harry felt the pressure of Tom’s erection begin to enter him and moaned as he was slowly stretched, slowly filled, “Oh yesss . . .”

Tom paused for a brief moment to catch his breath before he began to thrust. The hand that had been pressing Harry down lifted and grabbed his hip, Tom’s fingertips leaving indents in the soft flesh. The other hand shifted around to grip Harry’s unattended length, stroking it in time with his thrusts.

Harry rocked backwards into Tom’s thrusts, arched his back upwards, and repeated “Oh god,” in a prayer-like whisper. He was so caught up in the pleasure that he didn’t realize that Tom was saying something in response, something he couldn’t understand. Harry twisted his head a to the side to catch sight of Tom; he had his eyes nearly closed, just a sliver of red visible; and he was speaking softly in *parseltongue*. Tom looked positively feral and it was pushed Harry closer to the edge and he became lost in the sensations; the soft hissing, the touch of Tom’s hand on his erection, his own fingers leaving grooves on the oak desk, *Tom inside of him, Tom filling him so completely.*

“Tom. . . Oh god, Tom!” He shouted, uncaring that anyone might overhear, and he came, collapsing on the desk from the sheer pleasure of his release.

Tom continued to stroke him, increasing his speed as his hand became coated with Harry’s seed.

Harry managed to hold himself up as much as he could even though his body felt boneless and weak. Tom’s thrusts had increased as he had orgasmed and Harry could tell that he was nearing his limit when Tom gripped his hip tight enough to bruise and let out a cry before collapsing on top of him.

Harry didn’t know how long they remained like that; breathing heavily, skin against skin, Tom holding him close; but after a minute or an hour Tom slowly pulled away and Harry shakily stood and faced him.

“Don’t get it into your head that I’m easy.” Harry said in a shaky whisper and began to gather his clothes from the floor.

Tom watched, enjoying the view of this lean, long limbed man before him, “I would never dream of it.”
These two had wayyy too much sexual tension and they started to bone without my permission.
Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the delay but I had a pinched nerve that prevented me from writing and this chapter ended up getting split into two and just... it's been busy.

Jan 1st

Tom stretched out on his bed, arching his back and enjoying the silk sheets beneath him. There had been too many years of not having silk sheets, a mansion, and his every command obeyed.

Too many years of waiting for the right time.

He slowly opened his eyes, hesitant to face the new day after such a delightful evening. Harry had left around two in the morning, drunk and happy. He had thankfully refrained from upsetting anyone else that evening and had made polite conversation with some of the other guests including Livia Zabini and Lucius Malfoy. Regulus and Severus avoided him for the rest of the evening and Bellatrix had glared daggers at him. Harry had merely smiled back.

From the birthday present to the posturing with Bellatrix and then the events that took place in his study; the evening had been a series of surprises. Mostly pleasant ones.

“Stop thinking about the boy. He is beneath you.”

Tom cracked open an eye and looked at himself, “Why ever do you think I am thinking about him?”

The painting glared, the side of his mouth twitching into a sneer, “You were smiling.”

“I remember smiling the other day when I punished Rabastan, just because I’m smiling it doesn’t mean it’s about Potter.”

“You can lie to yourself but you can’t lie to me.”

“Mmm. You’ve caught me. Whatever shall you do?” Tom smirked nastily at the painting, “Oh, wait. You can do nothing,” He sat up and pushed his hair back, “I think you would like him if you were still around.”

The painting crossed his arms and frowned heavily, “I suggest you focus on the plan and not on a seventeen year old boy. The Wizengamot assembles tomorrow and you’ve been lying in bed instead of fending off Dumbledore’s plot to have a referendum. Get up and deal with the old fool!” He hissed before stomping out of his frame.

Tom rolled his eyes before climbing out of bed and dressing, “Miserable bastard.”

OoO

Lily slid the cup of coffee across the countertop to Severus, the steam billowing up in a little cloud between them. She set the sugar and cream in front of him and spoke softly, “I think this is the first
time you’ve ever shown up without an invitation. It must be serious to risk running into James.”

Snape took a small sip of coffee before adding a sprinkle of sugar and stirring it “... I need to ask a favour of you and it is slightly urgent.” He refrained from making eye contact and focused instead on the shapes of the steam from his coffee.

Lily sat on the stool on the other side of the counter and snickered, “Severus Snape comes to my home in the early hours of the morning asking me for a favour? You haven’t needed a favour since we were doing cheering charms for our OWLS,” she spread her arms wide, “What is it you require of the great Lily?”

He levelled her with an unimpressed look, “Anyone who tries to pretend that your son takes after his father is clearly knows nothing. You are the corrupting influence and it is horrifying what you have done to that child.”

They locked gazes and Lily managed to keep her expression as impassive as Snape’s for a full ten seconds before she cracked a smile, “Maybe I am.” She took a drink of coffee, “Now, I am Harry’s mother and I know the tactic of sidestepping a question to offset some damage from the main subject. What do you need?”

Snape sighed and rested his chin on his fist, “Dumbledore has not responded to my inquiry for the defence post. I was hoping that you could... vouch for me.”

The room was silent, Snape silently nursed his cup of coffee and again avoided eye contact with Lily who was staring intently at him, “Sev, I know you. You didn’t like children when we were children. Hogwarts is filled with irrational, illogical, irritating children that are steeped in hormones, and angst, and frankly, a lot of bullshit. I don’t think you’re cut out for that kind of life. What’s going on?”

Snape remained quiet, collecting his thoughts before speaking, his words carefully measured carefully, “Hogwarts is the only place that I will have the opportunity to teach what I know and am passionate about. I make my money brewing potions but we both know my talents lie in the Dark Arts. I can overcome “teenage bullshit” as you say, for the chance to truly utilize my skills.”

“Legally.” Lily said quietly, her mouth pursed.

“Yes.” He stated simply.

The room was weighed down with the unasked question, a dark miasma of tension coiling around them, squeezing and suffocating. Lily watched him closely, wanting answers that she knew he would not give. All he could ever give her were lies and they both knew that.

The dark mood was cut in half by a chipper, “Good Morning!” as Harry entered the kitchen, the door swinging open wildly. He strode in and around the two of them without a glance, heading straight for the fridge, “And how were your evenings? I saw that neither of you were up when I came home last night.” Harry asked as he began pulling his breakfast out.

“My evening could have been better if you had not been so heavily involved.” Snape drawled.

Harry snapped up quickly, cracked his head on the ceiling of the refrigerator and fell forward in a graceful heap in the span of two seconds. He laid on the tile floor holding his head and groaning as Lily and Snape watched idly from the sidelines.

“Harry, you need to be more careful. By the way Severus is visiting.”

“Wow, thanks for the support and loving care.” Harry grumbled, pulled himself up and pointed at
Snape, “What are you doing here?”

“That is none of your concern.” Snape replied and summoned the coffee pot and poured himself another cup, his black eyes never looking away from Harry.

Lily raised a hand as Harry opened his mouth, “Ah! No need for an inquisition. I get that enough from your father and Sirius whenever they find out Severus has been by,” she responded and conjured an ice pack before giving it to Harry, “I take it you were the one who nicked one of my hangover remedies.”

He put the icepack on the top of his head where he could feel a goose egg forming, “Maybe, maybe not, he said and continued his quest for breakfast, “I feel like there’s an implication that you think I was drinking alcohol last night which is something I would never do and frankly I’m insulted by this rampant and unfounded speculation.”

“. . . And purple isn’t Albus Dumbledore’s favourite colour.” Lily responded and turned to Snape “Do they do lesson’s in the Slytherin common room on how to be sarcastic?”

“Hey! You can’t ask questions like that!” Harry exclaimed, his glasses nearly flying off his nose as he turned to her, “What goes on in the dungeon, stays in the dungeon!”

Snape was looking at Harry, an eyebrow raised, and he slowly turned to her, “He is right but he is also in trouble. Telling an outsider about the vow of silence is forbidden.” He leant forward, giving Harry an unfathomable look, “I shall have to inform the elders.” He stated firmly.

“Inform them all you like but I have the ear of the Heir of Slytherin. He can override the council of elders.” Harry declared boldly, trying not to break into a smile.

Snape mumbled something but Harry could imagine it was something along the lines of, “That’s not the only thing of his you have.”

Lily turned to Snape, her eyebrow raised, “What was that?”

“Hmmm? Oh, good coffee.” He said and took a sip of his drink, his expression uncharacteristically pleasant looking.

The room was quiet again but not with suspicion; Lily and Snape were playing a game of mental ping pong. Harry quietly poured a bowl of cereal, he would have been eavesdropping but some people weren’t feeling particularly talkative.

“I guess I’ll go eat in the dining room,” Harry sighed heavily and looked skyward, “I can see I’m not wanted here. . . It’s not like it’s my last day here before having to head back to Hogwarts for a few more months. . . cut off from my childhood home.”

“Glad to see you can assess the situation.” Lily said and opened the door for him, “Have fun with your food.”

Harry stood there, ice pack resting on his head and bowl of cereal in his hand, his mouth open in shock, “Rude!” He declared before stomping out, “My own mother, turning me out, sending me into the cold dining room! Alone!” They could hear him muttering from the kitchen.

Snape pulled out his wand and cast muffliato around the two of them.

“His reputation precedes him.”
“It certainly does. Lord Slytherin has warned some of his inner circle to be vigilant of eavesdropping spells when your son is present.” Snape informed her.

Lily shook her head, “I can believe it. Did he behave himself last night?” She asked, taking his empty cup. Snape’s sudden stillness caught her attention, making her feel unsettled, “Severus? What happened?”

“. . . I believe I walked in on him performing fellatio on Lord Slytherin last night.” Snape admitted eventually. He would not be telling Lily about the incident with Bellatrix. Harry’s sexual escapades were slightly less troublesome than a bloodthirsty witch out for the Potter heir’s throat.

The cup was lowered into the counter with a loud “thunk” and Lily stared at him, her eyes wide with shock, “Sev, what the fuck?! I did not need to know that! Why would you tell me something like that?!“

“Someone has to suffer with me. And you did ask.”

Her jaw set in a hard line and she dumped the left-over coffee in the sink and began to manually wash the pot, “I did not need to know that.”

The room was silent except for the soapy sounds of Lily washing the dishes when the fireplace on the other side of the room flared up and James walked out, brushing soot off his robe, “Morning everyone,” he took his glasses off and began to clean them with the sleeve of his robe, he jerked his head in Snape’s direction, “How was your evening? You got home late.” He said firmly.

“Stalking my house Potter? I wouldn’t have thought you cared.” Snape drawled after dismissing the muffling charm.

James whipped around, slamming his glasses on his face and stared, wide-eyed at the unexpected guest, “What are you doing here?!”

Lily exhaled, already tired of the conversation, “The real question is what are you doing here? I thought there was a body to deal with”

Snape and James glared at one another and said nothing despite Lily’s question.

“Boys, do I have to separate you?”

James was the one to break eye contact and he turned to his wife, “It wasn’t a murder. . . Someone blew up their house elf last night instead of fireworks and it left a mess around Hogsmeade,” He ran his fingers through his hair and looked away with a sad expression, “It’s horrible but not technically illegal.”

“That’s awful.” Lily gasped, her brows knitted together in anger, “I can’t believe some people. . .”

“Especially with how much house elves cost,” Snape said apathetically.

James levelled him with a cold look, “I’d tell you to have some sensitivity but I know people like you lack the ability to show compassion.” He sneered.

“People like me?” Snape hissed, leaning forward, his black eyes flinty and ready for a fight.

The door behind Snape opened and Harry casually strode in and around, “I thought I recognized your dulcet tones father. I hope you and Severus haven’t been fighting.” He chided, winking at Lily, “These two, eh?”
“Stay out of it Harry,” James snarled before looking to Snape, “Severus, I think it’s time you left.”

“Whoa. Dad. Rude.” Harry said as he placed the bowl into the sink. He lifted his hands in a placating gesture, “There is no need for you to feel threatened by my and mom’s dear friend. If you really feel that insecure about the thought of him stealing Mom away imagine how she feels when you act like you’re going to suck Sirius off whenever he walks into the room,” James’ eyes widened in shock and Harry lifted a hand to prevent him from speaking, “Mom is a beautiful woman and she could choose from any man, including Severus here, but the fact is they are friends and you need to back off and not police her friendships. It’s not right and it’s just like when you told me not to be friends with Draco because you don’t like Lucius.

“So, you can calm down and not be mean to Severus because he is a friend. Mom is entitled to have her friends over whenever she wants just like you do. I don’t know the full history between the two of you, and frankly, I don’t want to but I imagine it started with him being in Slytherin, and as someone in Slytherin, I will stand by my compatriot.” Harry finished, his chin stuck out, and hands on his hips.

“Harry. . . I. . .” James stared at Harry, the shock on his face morphing into hurt before he walked from the room, slamming the door behind him.

The kitchen fell into yet another silence, Lily shaking her head and giving Harry an exasperated look that he was clearly used to.

“I see the Slytherin education has not changed.” Snape mused, a small, barely noticeable smile on his thin lips.

“Why would it? Playing off someone’s insecurities is part of the core curriculum. Like they would change that, it’s fundamental.” Harry responded with a wink, “So, do I get first name privilege. . . Severus?”

“Only if you are using it to irritate your father.”

“For Merlin’s sake. . .” Lily frowned, her eyes were red rimmed, “Harry, go to your room. Sev we’re going to have to cut this short.”

“Mom, you don’t have to do damage control. He’s an adult and he can handle some truths.” Harry said nonchalantly as he put the conjured ice pack in the freezer.

Lily let out a small sigh before pulling Harry into a hug. “You need to behave better,” she kissed his forehead and looked at the forming bump from his collision with the fridge, “How’s your head?”

“I’ve had no complaints.” He quipped instantly without thinking.

Lily and Snape watched Harry’s expressions cycle through disbelief, shock, and horror, “I need to go.” He muttered and ran from the room, the door slamming shut with a loud bang.

“. . . I can’t believe him sometimes.” Lily muttered and looked at Snape, “I will talk to Albus for you. I can’t guarantee anything will come of it.”

Snape nodded, “Thank you,” he straightened his robes, an uncomfortable expression crossed his face, “If I may ask. . . What happened between them? You used to describe them as being. . . close.”

She blew out a puff of air and looked at the floor, “James messed up when Harry was sorted into Slytherin and it’s all been downhill from there. He was upset about Harry not being in Gryffindor and didn’t know how to behave. Harry, being his observant self, noticed and asked why he was
being treated differently and James told him that he was reevaluating how he had viewed him,” Lily shook her head, “It caused a rift. Harry worked to become the quintessential Slytherin and James was never able to reconnect with him even after he realized he had been an ass... It’s not like living in the dungeon’s changes who you are.”

Snape stood there his arms crossed and his expression pensive, not saying anything, hoping she would provide more information without him having to ask.

“And now Harry is going down this road with Lord Slytherin and it worries me that he could be getting into serious trouble. I don’t really know anything about the man except what Harry tells me and he hardly tells me anything. James is convinced Slytherin is a Dark Lord and given his followers,” she glanced at Snape, “I am inclined to agree but it’s not like there is anything I can do. If I try to control Harry he will pull away and resent me, and if I agree with James I have to prevent him from driving a deeper wedge between the two of them. I am in a no-win situation and I have no one to go to.” She wrapped her arms around herself tightly and looked towards the backdoor. Her normally cheerful face lined with worry.

Snape stood behind her, his hand outstretched, ready to grasp her shoulder and reassure her that everything will be fine. He slowly lowered it, clenching it into a fist at his side, “Lily... If you need... I’ll always be there for you and, I can be there for Harry too.” He said as though it pained him, “I’ll keep an eye out for him.”

Lily turned slowly and pulled Snape into a tight hug, “Thank you Sev.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you far all the lovely comments btw you're all so amazing and I freaking love you all.
Jan 2nd

The canvas didn’t feel right. Harry rubbed his thumb across the oil painting. The older Tom Riddle stood within, a dark splendor pouring off him in waves. He was handsome with his red eyes and cold aloofness but something unsettling about the painting.

Harry lightly touched it with the tips of his fingers brushing across Tom’s face. The painting didn’t react. Didn’t snap at him for touching the canvas, the canvas where something was very wrong. It didn’t move.

It was completely still like a muggle painting.

Tom would not like being in a muggle painting. Tom would not like being painted by muggles. Harry knew this. He knew that Tom loved magic. He didn’t need the man to tell him that he loved magic. He just knew. Like when he had met Hermione on the train, she had been so excited, so in love with magic. The passion she had for it was just like Tom.

A door opened behind him, the sound of a woman laughing cut through the air before being snuffed out by the quiet click of the handle as the door closed. Soft footsteps approached. Harry paid it little attention.

“It’s too smooth,” he whispered to the other occupant of the room.

A frigid chill entered his bones as the person behind him set his hands on Harry’s shoulders. They were spread out, and not wrapped around his neck... but they could be in a moment. He tried to move his head to see but he couldn’t. He couldn’t do anything except gaze on the image of Tom Riddle.

Harry Potter. The words weren’t spoken but he heard them clearly, Are you ready to enter the world we are creating?

The words were caught in his throat. Unable to be spoken. To assure the man that, yes, he was ready, he was ready to help Tom in his quest.

He tried to move his head but it was like he was petrified, locked in his body, trapped. The picture beneath him began to morph and swirl, a million bugs writhing, pulsing under his fingertips as the image changed into Barty Crouch Senior, dead with bloated purple veins stretched out across his skin and maggots in his eyes.

Harry tried to drop the painting but his fingers wouldn’t move, wouldn’t release their grip on this accursed image as it began shifting again.

The chill from the frigid hands on his chest bled through into his chest, into his heart and Harry could swear he could feel his pulse slowing as the contents reformed into the picture of two people, lying on the ground tightly holding the other’s hand. Their eyes wide open, unseeing.

He bit back a quiet sob at the sight of his parent’s bodies lying dead in some unidentifiable field.
Sacrifices will be made, Harry Potter, and the Dark Lord has no need for weakness.

The hands gripped his throat tightly, squeezing his windpipe as he desperately tried to suck in air. He was finally able to let go of the painting, it fell to the floor in a clatter, landing on the front and revealing the back of the canvas.

It was red. Vibrant red of blood, and veins and flesh. It was flesh. The painting was on skin.

Bile rose in his throat as he was spun around to face Tom Riddle. He could still tell it was Tom despite the clear mutilation. Incredibly thin with white scaled skin, the normally charming red eyes promised untold violence and he was still crushing his throat.

Harry tried to cry out, his fingers biting into the other man’s arm as his vision began to go dark.

There was a scream of “Stop!” in the distance but Harry could barely hear it as the world went dark.

He opened his eyes slowly.

He was in his bedroom. It was still night time. A branch skittered across his window, carving a path through the frost etched onto it.

Visions of his nightmare were fading quickly and soon all he could remember was the body of Barty Crouch Senior, with twisted dark purple veins across his body.

Harry turned onto his side, facing the wall and started to fall back asleep, not feeling the bruises on his neck.

OoO

The unfinished Potions homework sat on his desk in front of him. He should get it done and out of the way. Even if he ignored it for today there would be the weekend before classes started for him to work on it. It was tossed into the pile at the top of his trunk.

It could wait.

There was a dull pounding in his head that had not gone away since he had woken up an hour ago and the thought of sitting and writing that essay had not improved his mood and his bad mood was accompanied with unpleasant thoughts he had been pushing out of his head.

For years, he had been acting the part of a cold and intellectual Slytherin with little regard for questions of morality, but with the imminent death of Barty Crouch Sr, Harry was reluctantly weighing the value of a life.

And if he would end up in Azkaban for knowing about an assassination beforehand and doing nothing.

Harry had only had a few interactions with Crouch and none of them had been particularly enjoyable; the man simply wasn’t likable but did he deserve to die? It wasn’t like Harry could just send him a letter warning him that he would be killed. It would ruin Tom’s plans and he, apparently, needed the Crouch vote during Conclave.

And just what did it say about Crouch that his son was so eager to end the man? Harry would easily admit that he barely knew a thing about Crouch outside the fact that he was seemingly a horrible father and a stern boss.
The throbbing in his head increased and he pinched the bridge of his nose hoping it would alleviate some of the tension he felt.

It didn’t work.

There was no one he could ask. His Slytherin friends would be biased towards him remaining silent and any family would push for him to turn in Tom and the inner circle. It was something he would have to figure out on his own. He did wonder if the plots to kill Dumbledore and Crouch were exceptional circumstances or if this was going to be how it was.

How many people would die once Tom became king? Or would they stop. . . Were these deaths just stepping stones needed to get him to the finish line?

He pushed the questions to the back of his mind, making a quiet vow to learn occlumency to better compartmentalize in the future. He had a feeling he was going to need it.

Letting out a shaky breath Harry glanced to his wardrobe where his robes hung. They were nicer than his regular fare but not quite dress robes. There was no need to be overly formal today. . .

There was a staccato knocking on his door and Harry glanced at the clock on his desk. It was only 8:30 in the morning. He opened the door to his father standing outside with his robes disheveled and hair a complete mess, “Is there something I can help you with?” Harry asked blithely.

“We’re running late. I don’t want to get caught in the gridlock.” James stated and gestured for Harry to get his stuff ready.

Harry took a step backwards and put his hands up in a placating move, “What are you talking about? Even if I was going by train it doesn’t leave till 11.” He leant up against the door frame and crossed his arms.

“This is the last chance you’ll have to take the train. You’ll regret it if you don’t.” James said with a small, sad smile. He surveyed Harry from over his glasses.

His lips pressed into a thin line and gave a minute shake of his head, “They didn’t cancel the spring holidays. That’s the real last chance I would have to take the train and even then, I would prefer to apparate to the station.”

James looked up to the ceiling in exasperation, “You’re going to miss the chance to catch up with your friends before classes start . . . you’ve had an awfully eventful break. I bet Hermione wants to know what’s going on. I know you’ve been mostly with your Slytherin friends this break.”

James was being sickly sweet and it set Harry’s teeth on edge. He didn’t hate his father but he didn’t necessarily trust him. He didn’t know what drove the man and could never tell what James actually wanted.

Blaise had once told him that the hardest people to read were the ones you were closest to.

Harry was inclined to agree.

“Dad, it’s a Friday. I will have all weekend to catch up with them and Hermione is currently, maybe, not talking to me.” The throbbing in his head had begun to increase again.

James reared back in surprise and blinked rapidly, “Hermione isn’t talking to you? What did you do?”
Clenched his jaw tightly and tried to ignore the accusation, “I skipped out on meeting up with her a while ago. She’s been giving me the silent treatment.” Harry stated matter-of-factly.

“You shouldn’t treat your friends like that.” James frowned, his hazel eyes looking at a point above Harry’s head, not making eye contact.

“Please,” Harry snarled, “Shit happens. I missed a meeting and she’s been silent since then. It’s not my fault she took it so personally. As it is, I sent her a Christmas present, which should smooth the issue over.” He really didn’t want to be talking about this with his father. It wasn’t his business.

“Or maybe you should apologize to her.”

Harrried worried that he was going to break a tooth with how hard he had his jaw clenched, “I did. With a present.”

“Did you actually put a note in it or is it implied?” James demanded, his hands on his hips.

“Dad,” Harry said firmly, a hand cutting through the space between them, “How about you mind your own business. I know your dream for my future is that I marry Hermione, renounce my Slytherin ways, and become a world class quidditch player that always thanks you when I win a game. Unfortunately, that is not going to happen.” Harry hissed his green eyes blazing with repressed anger, “I know what you were trying to do. You wanted to trap me in that crappy Mini and lecture me on my life choices and how I’m going down the wrong path and you hope I will see the error of my ways! I can tell you right now I am not letting you hold me hostage. So, how about you go visit Sirius or Remus and leave me alone?!” He slammed and locked the door. For added measure he pushed his trunk up against it and sat on it.

Not that his father couldn’t apparate in or just _reducio_ the door but it was the principle of the matter.

There was a soft thump as James leant against the door with a sigh.

Harry wasn’t sure how long they sat in silence, before his father spoke, “. . . I’m sorry that our relationship has gotten this bad and I know it’s my fault,” James’ voice caught and Harry clenched his hands tightly, “I just wanted to spend some time with you and I thought taking you to London would be a good time for us to just talk,” he pushed off the door and began to head down the stairs, “I guess I’ll see you at Easter.”

Harry didn’t reply. His eyes focused on where his nails had bit into the palms of his hands. There was a loud crack of his father disapparating, echoing through the house, announcing its empty state.

He felt the same.

“Damn it.” He wiped his eyes quickly and began to put on his robes. He had places to be.

His father could wait.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the small chapter. Next one will be longer! Pinky swear!
Chapter 8

Jan 2nd

The press and members of the Wizengamot milled around like a swarm of ants, occasionally forming
groups and having quick and quiet conversations before disbanding and forming new groups and
exchanging their recently acquired knowledge. It was an orgy but one where information was
exchanged instead of bodily fluids.

The younger members, not that there were many, had minor eavesdropping charms cast on them as
they were the ones couriering the information around. It seemed like opinions on Lord Slytherin
were split; either he had a noble heritage and would bring prosperity, or he was a fraud that was
seeking to usurp Wizarding Britain and would lead it into ruin.

The only thing they all seemed to agree on was the fact that they believed the Wizengamot had no
authority over the Sacred 27 and Conclave assemblies. If they managed to assert some sort of
authority over conclave today it would be a precedent setting event that would change the dynamic
of wizarding Britain for years to come; many palms had likely been greased to ensure that did not
happen.

The nobility would not react positively to a loss of control. It would probably end with heads on
pikes and a complete regression of their society.

Harry closed his eyes, let his head fall back against the wall and just listened to the conversations. A
small twitch of his wand was the only signal that he was flicking between each group every thirty
seconds or so.

There was a susurrus of a velvet cloak trailing on the ground that drew his attention.

Harry reluctantly opened his eyes and suspended the eavesdropping charms; leaving them running
but silent. He knew that gait. He had been living with it for the better part of a decade.

“Potter,” Draco said with his patented sneer as he leant up next to Harry, their shoulders touching.
The superior expression was ruined by his bright-eyed eagerness at being permitted to skip the train
actually attend a Wizengamot session.

Harry stared at his nails for a moment as if he had not heard Draco. “Malfoy,” Harry replied in a cold
tone, “Fancy meeting you here.”

“Please. My family has Wizengamot seats and a seat in conclave. Seeing you here is the surprise.”
Draco replied with an aura of haughty superiority, “Shouldn’t you be on the train with all the little
people?”

Harry’s cold expression fell and he nodded distantly, “Yeah. You’re right,” he lowered his hand and
looked out into the crowd blankly, barely paying attention to all of the key players moving through
the crowd, “I shouldn’t be here.” A feeling he had been trying to smother flared up and he clenched
his teeth, trying to suppress the shame he had been feeling regarding his conversation with his father.
He wouldn’t be able to think about the Hogwarts Express without remembering it for quite a while.

“. . . are you feeling well?” Draco asked, taking Harry’s shoulders and casting a privacy spell around
them and breaking Harry’s links to his eavesdropping charms. Concern was etched on his pointed
face. It was not an expression Harry had seen on Draco’s face much before.
Harry bit his lip and looked to the side, “Do you think there’s a card I can get for my father that says, ‘I’m sorry that I’ve been a dick and I do feel bad about the situation but I refuse to fall for your emotional manipulations’?”

Two silver blonde brows rose, Draco loved gossip as much as the next person but seemed to feed off the drama that was Harry’s family life. Probably something he liked to feel superior over since he had a good relationship with Lucius, “What happened?”

“The guilt tripping of the year. . . and it’s only the second of January,” Harry ran his hand through his hair, messing up what had been painstakingly combed hair, “I think I freaked my dad out over my. . .” He glanced at Draco, who looked concerned but eager for information, “relationship with Lord Slytherin.”

Draco nodded and released Harry’s shoulders, “My father said that you were at the gathering on the 31st. I assumed that the meeting on Yule went well and he had recruited you despite your family’s more liberal views,” he put his hand on his hip, “You must have impressed him to be included at New Years Celebration.”

Harry averted his eyes, and knew the back of his neck was red, “Lord Slytherin and I have a bit of a different relationship then what everyone else has been expecting. . . we’re involved.”

Draco’s eyes opened comically wide and he took half a step back, “Involved? Like involved, involved? Like, when he becomes king your room will be next to his, involved? Does my father know about this?! He hissed and lunged forward, grabbing Harry’s robes.

Harry began to peel Draco’s fingers off his robes, and press down the wrinkles he had created, “I don’t know if your father knows about it but the problem is that my father does. . . and so does my mum and Severus Snape. . . and Sirius, and Remus, and Regulus and probably everyone my dad knows and,” Harry buried his face in his hands, “And I don’t know what to do because I’m getting stressed out by my family freaking out about this. It’s high profile and I like Lord Slytherin and my father is just silently, and not so silently, judging me and he’s also trying to reach out which makes me want to pull away more.” He wanted to curse himself for getting close to a breakdown like this, especially in front of Draco. Slytherin’s didn’t do this kind of emotional drama in front of one another. It was a sign of weakness and he had just handed Draco any ammunition he would need in the future.

Grey eyes stared blankly at him, “So. . . you are involved with Lord Slytherin?”

As he rolled his eyes Harry could swear he felt something pop, “Am I talking to Draco Malfoy or Ronald Weasley?”

“That is going too far!” Draco exclaimed and lightly punched Harry’s arm, “So that’s why you’re here? To see your, . . . boyfriend?”

Either Draco was being nice and not acknowledging the little break Harry had had or he genuinely didn’t care, whatever the case Harry was thankful, “I’m here because I want to see how the session will go. It’s pretty rare for the Wizengamot to try and interfere with the Sacred 27.”

“They have no chance at success. . . Whoever arranged for this session to happen today was a genius. A good portion of the younger members aren’t even here right now because of the Hogwarts express.”

Younger was a partial code for “liberal” and Harry had to appreciate the genius of setting the session for today. Maybe he would ask Tom about it.
Draco had returned to his spot on the wall and glanced warily to him, “Are you really involved with Lord Slytherin?”

Harry was pretty sure he was going to crack a tooth from grinding his teeth so much, “Yes.”

“Does Lord Slytherin know?”

Harry shot Draco a scandalized look, “Do you think I’m delusional?!”

“Did he officially ask to court you or has he been covert about this? It could just be some wishful thinking on your part. Like you’re good looking but you are a halfblood and—”

Blood pounded in his temples and Harry pinched the bridge of his nose to avoid punching his friend, “Draco. . . Stop talking. I know Lord Slytherin and I are involved and so does he. I don’t think you need the details. And my father found out because he walked in on Lord Slytherin and I sucking face during the Lansdowne Yule ball.”

Draco gawked in a very undignified manner, “Oh. Wow. I . . wow. Have you and he . . .”

“You are about to get the hexing of your life in front of the Wizengamot and the press.” Harry growled, his wand held tight.

“I’m sorry but it’s not every day your friend announces that he’s with the bloody king to be!” Draco exclaimed.

“Learn to deal with it!” He snapped and shoved his wand up his sleeve to avoid the temptation to curse his friend.

A gong rang out announcing it was time to begin assembly. Wizengamot members and spectators began to file in to the large room. Draco and Harry were near the back of the crowd and made their way to the back benches, up against the wall. They sat in silence but Draco would shoot him occasional glances as they waited for the session to begin. When Tom entered Draco just straight up stared at the Slytherin heir who was flanked on all sides by the press.

Harry watched the group of reporters with a blank expression. Not seeing the flash of blonde hair in the crowd around Tom, he looked to Draco, “Do you think Skeeter dropped dead? I can’t believe she would miss this.” Anything to get them off the previous topic.

Draco leaned against the wall, his lips quirked up, “I cannot fathom your dislike of the woman. She is quite lovely and can be utilized to work against your enemies.”

Harry let out a bark of laughter, not noticing the silence throughout the hall, “That’s just what your father has said! Does he have his hand up your ass like a puppet or is there an original thought in that pretty blonde head of yours?”

Draco gaped, his mouth bobbing up and down, searching for words, “I can’t believe you have the nerve!” he exclaimed lamely.

Harry chuckled, covering his mouth, “Believe it puppet boy.”

There was a loud clearing of the throat followed by, “Boys? We’re trying to do something important down here.” Came the voice of Cornelius Fudge from the center of the room.

Harry and Draco slowly turned their heads to see the entire Wizengamot looking up at them; annoyance written across their faces, and a hint of anger breaking through Lucius Malfoy’s carefully constructed façade. Tom’s face was completely expressionless except for a tiny smirk on his full lips.
Draco let out a strangled squeak and sat up ramrod straight with his hands on his knees, and stared forward like a statue. Harry gave a small nod to the Wizengamot and flushed a tiny bit.

The crowd turned away and Harry was going to have to live with the fact that everyone heard what he had called Draco.

He was not going to live this down.

Even in the furthest part of the room Harry could see the twinkling of Dumbledore’s eyes as the man approached the centre of the room, “We have gathered today for a special session regarding the heir or Slytherin and his potential ascendency to kingship.”

Harry zoned out as Dumbledore began a history lesson on the monarchy and why there hadn’t been a monarch for centuries. It was all old news and he didn’t care. The situation was also not helped by the fact that Tom was watching him intently.

Tom wore a reserved expression as Dumbledore droned on, likely listing all the downsides of a monarchy and the “evilness” of Salazar Slytherin and his blood supremacy. The Tom in front of the Wizengamot was the perfect example of a well-behaved pureblood. Harry preferred the Tom behind closed doors.

Harry smiled at him and proceeded to cross his eyes and stick his tongue out.

There was a slight eye widening but still the closed off expression remained and Tom diverted his attention away. Harry admired Tom’s ability to not react. Harry knew he would have burst out laughing if any one of his friends had done such a thing.

With Tom not making eye contact anymore, Harry began to look around the room in earnest. The press were up close to the stage, bored to tears and waiting for Dumbledore to finish this unnaturally long speech.

Harry actually liked Dumbledore’s opening speeches at Hogwarts; some little random words or the odd little cat fact he had announced in his third year; that a group of cats was called a “clowder”. He had been staring at McGonagall when he had said it too.

What Harry wouldn’t give to find out why.

Looking around the room, Harry realized that everyone was looking to the center of the room except for one person. One person whose bloodshot eyes were glaring at him with an intense hatred that made his skin crawl.

Ulysses Nott.

A scowl broke out across Harry’s face. He liked Theo Nott well enough but Harry knew his roommate maintained a distance from him because of Harry’s halfblood status; Ulysses Nott was a perfect example of the cancerous bigotry of the pureblood nobility and he was passing it onto his son.

Harry turned away, not deigning to give the man any of his attention.

Lily Potter didn’t hate many people but Ulysses Nott was one of the few that had made her list. He had campaigned continuously to prevent her from taking the Potions position because of her “inferior blood” and that she would poison the minds of her students. It had happened a few years before he was to attend Hogwarts but he remembered her increased stress.
Dumbledore had been the one to put his foot down with Nott by telling him if he had such a problem with his hire, then he could send Theodore to Durmstrang or homeschool the boy himself.

At least that’s what Vince had told him. Harry was inclined to believe him. He wasn’t the brightest and the tips of his ears turned red when he tried to lie.

Nott had been speaking to Tom at the Yule ball and the man had been upset at the time. Harry could only imagine it was about him. . . but Nott wasn’t a member of the inner circle. He wasn’t there on New Years.

Unless he was busy attending something else.

A shudder wracked his lithe form. He really hoped Ulysses Nott was not a member of the inner circle. Harry would be crucioed before he had a chance for any sort of posturing like he had done with Bellatrix. He was certain the man was one of those purebloods that participated in muggle hunting.

The sound of scattered applause pulled him from his thoughts, and Dumbledore stepped down from the podium, for his spot to be taken by Horace Slughorn. Harry had expected Lucius to speak for the members of the Sacred 27, he was one of the better public speakers out of the lot, but allowing Slughorn, who was considered a moderate, to speak their case was ideal. Normally Malfoy would bully his way to be the speaker but him deigning to step aside for once and let a moderate put the Sacred 27 in a better, more approachable light.

It was a clever and subtle play. Harry liked it.

Slughorn cleared his throat and looked to the assembled crowd with a smile, “Good afternoon everyone,” Slughorn paused like he was waiting for them to respond back, as if he was in class and they were his students. Most of them had been his students after all. He continued after receiving a few halfhearted greetings, “I could spend the next hour telling you the benefits and the disadvantages of having a monarchy reestablished in Britain, but I feel that it has been covered pretty well by the staff at the Daily Prophet, the Wizarding World News, and the Ministerial Post. The fact of the matter is that it is not the Wizengamot’s place to interfere with the decisions of the Sacred 27.

“We understand that our decision regarding Lord Slytherin will have heavy consequences but as the ruling class it is our decision to make;” he said solemnly, “While we have not had a King or Queen for centuries Britain is still a monarchy; decisions have been made at Conclave that coincide with the votes of the Wizengamot but the Wizengamot is a branch of the monarchy that was created by King Hamish to provide additional support to the Sacred 27.

“I fear that if the Wizengamot attempts to interfere with the ruling of Conclave that it may lead to hostilities.” Slughorn looked sadly at the crowd, his expression concerned, “Magical Britain cannot afford to suffer through a civil war. If Lord Slytherin becomes our regent he will answer to us and we have always done our best to protect the population of Britain.” He finished and stepped down, letting the hall break out into whispers.

Harry tried not to laugh at Slughorn’s last statement. The royals had always done their best to protect the pureblood population and their values.

There was a low buzz of conversation and the podium was empty for a minute or two before a woman with honey blonde hair, sun kissed skin like she had just come back from holiday in Majorca, periwinkle robes, and bright smile made it easy to forget what kind of bloodsucking monster she was.
A solicitor.

Not just any solicitor either; Ursula St. Clair. She was in charge of ensuring the Wizengamot and the Sacred 27 didn’t overstep their bounds; that the law was obeyed, or bent, depending on what was happening at that moment; she knew the rules back to front, upside down, mirrored, and all the loopholes. Being her friend could get you places that you had never dreamed; being her enemy could get you places too; very uncomfortable, awkward, dreadful places, that could be much, much worse than Azkaban.

James hated her and cursed her name.

Harry admired her.

This was the first time he had ever seen her in person and it didn’t let him down. She was as lovely as the she was the day she was turned into a vampire. He would easily admit that he was impressed that Ursula had never gotten bored with being the legal counsel of both the Wizengamot and the Sacred 27 after four centuries, but she found her niche and had been running with it.

He could appreciate that.

“Esteemed members of the Wizengamot,” she began with a pandering smile on her face which quickly morphed into a scowl, “I have found three laws that support the Wizengamot’s right to hold a referendum, or interfere with the Sacred 27’s rulings,” She dropped a heavy book on the podium with a thud and opened it, “and I have found 86 laws that do not and we are going to go through them all before any kind of vote will be allowed today.” She stated firmly.

Harry groaned and Draco nudged him in the ribs before whispering, “Spectators can leave when they want. Let’s go.” They made their way out of the hall with a few other spectators and stood further down the corridor.

Harry turned to him, ready to beg for forgiveness, “Draco, I am so sorry.”

Grey eyes narrowed and the Malfoy heir landed a quick and hard punch to Harry’s bicep, “You owe me three favours and unlimited access to gossip for three months.” He said imperiously.

“Ow!” Harry rubbed the spot where Draco’s boney knuckles had hit him, “I will agree to the favours but only one month of gossip.”

“Accepted,” Draco replied tersely and crossed his arms, “And if you ever refer to me as a puppet again I will challenge you to a duel, which I will win and you will be shamed for the rest of your life.”

Harry snorted before looking to the Wizengamot door, “Fine, fine. . . How long do you think she will take?”

The only response he received was a shrug.

“Want to get something to eat? My treat to apologize for referring to you as a . . . marionette.” Harry offered, he had barely had anything to eat after he had had his argument with his father.

“Sounds good.” Draco turned on his heel and began to head down the corridor to the elevator. He stopped suddenly and Harry nearly walked into him.

Tom was standing just outside the door looking at them. His perfectly sculpted eyebrow raised just a smidge.
He looked delicious. Harry fought down any inappropriate thoughts. They were in public for Morganas sake!

“Lord Slytherin,” Draco said reverently and bowed, “An honour to meet you.”

Tom inclined his head, but his eyes were on Harry, “Likewise. I need to borrow Mr. Potter from you.” There was no room for argument and Harry doubted Draco would even try.

“Of course. If you need to find me I will be in the café.” He bowed again and left. Tom and Harry watched until he got on the elevator and turned and walked to the opposite end of the corridor, past the department of mysteries and around the corner where there was no one around.

Tom erected a privacy charm and merely looked at Harry, concern etched in his young-looking face. It worried Harry.

“I take it you didn’t bring me down here to have your wicked way with me.”

Tom shook his head, a small smile on his lips, “Unfortunately, that is not the case,” he brushed Harry’s hair back behind his ear, his hand lingering there, “I had a dream where you were hurt and I just wanted to make sure you were safe.”

Of all the things Tom could have said, that was not what he had expected, “Oh.”

“Sometimes there’s a part of me that argues that I shouldn’t get attached, but I’ve found myself growing quite fond of you,” Tom said quietly and kissed him.

Harry sank into it, reciprocating in earnest before Tom broke the connection. A feeling of disappointment bloomed in his chest.

“I have to go back,” Tom’s hand brushed his cheek, “Maybe soon we can have a more private... date. Something where we are not surrounded.”

Harry bit his lip before smiling shyly, “I’ll find out when the next Hogsmeade weekend is.”

“I’ll see you then.” Tom kissed him again and returned to the Wizengamot.

oOoOo

“Took you long enough.” Draco muttered, before leaning across the table, leering at Harry, “What did Lord Slytherin want to discuss? Give me the gossip.”

Harry glared at his friend, “What happened between us is not gossip, not any of your business in the first place. I will tell you what Daphne said about Pansy that could cause a conflict similar to the Weasley-Malfoy feud.”

“Do tell.”

They sat there for the better part of an hour; Harry giving Draco some gossip that could tear the girl’s dormitories apart if it got out; what homework they had skimped on doing; and what they received for Christmas before their attention was drawn to the influx of Wizengamot members entering the café.

“Did they take a recess?” Draco wondered aloud.

A group of older men walked past them, talking in whispers, but Harry was able hear one of them
say, “-thankful they let us vote without having to listen to all of St. Clair’s list. Damn vampire. She keeps trying to put us to sleep so she can eat us!”

“We missed the vote.” Harry said, his eyes wide and turned to see if there was anyone he recognized nearby.

Barty Crouch Sr., stood nearby with his neatly trimmed mustache and guilt coiled in Harry’s stomach like a poisonous serpent before he turned again and spotted Alice Longbottom.

“Mrs. Longbottom!” Harry waved with a charming smile plastered across his face.

She gave him a skeptical look and walked over, “Shouldn’t you be on the train?” Her hands were on her hips like she was about to scold him.

“Probably,” he replied flippantly before pressing, “How did the vote go? We missed it by accident.”

Alice smirked, her brown eyes twinkled before she leant in conspiratorially, her cheek right up against his. Harry would never admit it but once upon a time he may have had a crush on her.

He could feel her breath on his ear, “Your boyfriend only has to worry about Conclave. The Wizengamot won’t interfere,” she pulled away, missing Draco’s horrified expression, “And you can tell him that we will fight him every step of the way.”

He stared blankly as Alice Longbottom vanished into the crowd. She had never spoken to him like that before and frankly he was a little scared.

Why did his mom have such scary friends?

oOoOo

It was late into the night. Well after the Wizengamot session and the printing of the evening edition of the Daily Prophet which lay in the center of the table.

WIZENGMOT VOTES FOR NONINTERFERANCE

Horace Slughorn’s slightly nervous smile radiated up at the group of men from the front page.

Nott tapped the newspaper, his finger smudging the ink slightly, “This was our biggest obstacle outside of Dumbledore’s meddling. We are so close to complete control of Britain,” he looked at the other men, “And Riddle is out being seen with a filthy halfblood.”

The man across from Nott lent forward, the lower part of his face hidden behind his interlaced fingers, “I have spoken to Riddle about this. He has assured me that he is using Potter. The boy may be a halfblood but he is in a critical spot that we can use to our advantage. His parents are firmly in Dumbledore’s pocket; he can get us information if need be.”

He drained his wine glass, “Dapper more.”

A house elf stepped forward with a decanter of wine and silently poured the man a cup before returning to the shadows.
“. . . Given what we have of his, you would think he would stay in line.” Nott grumbled.

“Riddle always liked to take risks and push boundaries, don’t be surprised that he hasn’t changed.”
Chapter 9

Jan 3rd

Harry sat in the library, head cradled in his arms, his potions homework shoved to the side, words blotted out by the black ink that was smeared across the bottom half of it.

His breathing was the slow rhythm of someone who was sleeping soundly. The rustling of robes nearby caused him to stir slightly, his arm travelling through the already ruined essay, staining his hand and a section of the table black.

There was a small sigh followed by, “Harry, you’re a right mess,” Hermione muttered and sat down, taking Harry’s essay, and doing her best to siphon off the excess ink, “Why did you wait until the last day to do this?” she lamented on his behalf and began to read it over, looking for errors.

Harry lifted his head weakly and gave her a slightly confounded look, his glasses askew, “Because I’m an idiot?”

Hermione raised an eyebrow, “I’m happy you’ve finally come to terms with your situation. The first step towards recovery is admitting you have a problem.” She pulled out her quill and began to mark his paper with a satisfied smirk.

Harry looked blankly at her for a moment, still waiting for the cobwebs of sleep to leave, “I... I take it that you still haven’t completely forgiven me despite that lovely book I gave you?”

“As much as I enjoy learning about the Etruscan civilization, which I do, I much prefer not being snubbed.” She stated as haughty as any noble born witch, and shoved his mostly clean essay back at him, one mistake noted and two areas where he apparently needed to further clarify his opinion.

Harry put the paper down, leaned forward, pushing his glasses high up on his nose, hoping to accentuate his sorrowful green eyes, “I’m sorry Hermione,” he said with a pout, “I’ve just had such a busy and difficult time recently and I know I was supposed to meet with you and tell you all about it and I failed. I hope you forgive me for this grievous slight against your honour. I know you value knowledge above all else despite being in Gryffindor.” It wasn’t an entirely sincere apology but there was some actual regret underneath it all and that was what mattered.

Hermione wore the look of someone who had just been handed a pile of Hippogriff dung and was told it was soft gold, “Riiiiight,” she crossed her arms and leaned back looking at him with skepticism, “So, how was your break? Do anything fun? Go anywhere interesting? Meet with any tall, dark and handsome pureblood supremacists bent on furthering the interests of the upper class while leaving the lower classes to suffer?”

Harry pursed his lips; Hermione would not accept any compliments he had for Tom, and she knew that Harry did not support the pureblood nobility and had complained about it to her in the past.

She would see through his lies like they were crystal, “. . . Maybe.”

“Learn anything interesting?”
Harry bit his lip and glanced away before throwing up a privacy charm. It was time for the patented *Harry Potter Deflection technique*, “Some things... mainly that he is very good at kissing.”

He had expected her eyes to open wide, her jaw to slacken, anything except *The Slowly Raised Eyebrow of Skepticism*, “You expect me to believe that you’ve kissed Lord Slytherin?”

“Yes? A few times in fact,” Harry twiddled his thumbs and tried not to make eye contact with her, his cheeks had begun to grow hot. He really hoped that he would be able to distract her by revealing something personal. It wasn’t like he had ever told her directly that he liked men but apparently, nothing could surprise the unflappable Hermione Granger, “We are actually sort of... together. Like a couple.”

Hermione stood up quickly, knocking her chair down, “Harry, if you don’t want to tell me what happened at least have the decency not to lie to me.” She snapped and moved to grab her bag.

Harry’s hand shot out and grabbed her wrist, stopping her, “I am not lying,” he said earnestly, “Thomas is not what I expected and... I’m sorry I don’t know what to say.” Harry let go of her and slumped back, “I can’t tell you everything that’s happened, and I would prefer if you kept my relationship status to yourself, but I am not lying.” His cheeks flushed again and he looked away, “I promise I’m not lying. You can even ask my mum.”

Hermione sat down slowly, her hands folded on her lap, she knew Lily wouldn’t lie to her.

Lily was a teacher and teachers did not lie.

Much

Hermione stared into space for a moment, collecting her thoughts before she cocked her head to the side and spoke slowly, measuring each word carefully, “Harry... you’re my friend and I respect you, to a certain degree,” He tried not to feel offended by that, “but we both know where Lord Slytherin’s loyalties lie and it is not with halfbloods or muggleborns. The only people who are interested in making sure he becomes King are dreadful, horrible people and I know you are better than that. I know you can see the bigger picture and in that picture where he is at the top, people like me are at the bottom. Despite that outer Slytherin coating I know you are a good person and will not stand for it.”

Deflection: Failed

Harry ignored the small jabs and sighed, “He’s a good person... You would like him if you met him. I know he’d like you. It’s just... a persona he has to wear. He’s much more open minded than you think.”

Hermione let out an exasperated groan, “For Merlin’s sake Harry! You don’t get it, do you? There is a column dedicated to him in the Daily Prophet, he’s regularly talked about in Witch Weekly and every news source that we have access to! Lord Slytherin is powerful, he has the ear of the nation, whether we like it or not.” She swung her arm out in a grand, all-encompassing gesture, “Anything he says against muggleborns instantly makes things worse for us! More sneers and taunts, it makes it more likely that people will hesitate to give us jobs, or even treat us as human beings! He has the kind of influence to actually change pureblood perspectives to the better, to make it so I won’t be a second class citizen when I graduate Hogwarts, but he uses it to further the interests of his friends and political allies!” She had slammed her fists down on the table, her eyes alight with a righteous fury, “If you really think that his behavior is acceptable then you are an accessory to the suffering of muggleborns and halfbloods all throughout Britain.”
Harry sat back, his eyes wide in shock, he had not known that talking about Lord Slytherin would
arouse such anger in Hermione. He was pretty sure Tom hadn’t said anything inflammatory against
muggleborns in the press, but he hadn’t necessarily said anything that would help them either.

Her eyes were boring holes into his skull the longer he remained silent, “You said you respect me,
that you’re my friend. You know me. You know my mum and you know my dad. You know who I
am as a person and you know that I am not a raging blood purist and that I wouldn’t date someone
who is a raging blood purist,” He held up his hand when it looked like she was about to interrupt, “I
won’t sing his praises to you because I know that you already consider me biased, but what if I gave
you a chance to speak to him? Via letter or, maybe, in person? I want to give him the chance to
defend himself and I don’t want to do it for him. It’s not my place and if he can’t defend his stance to
you, the best witch in Hogwarts, then he has no right being King.” Harry finished and held his
breath, hoping that he had prevented the explosion of Mount Hermione, the most dangerous volcano
in the solar system.

Hermione chewed her lip fretfully but her expression remained dark and her arms were crossed, he
really had not expected her to be so fervent in her opposition to Tom, but then he had not spoken to
her in over a month and quite a bit had happened in that time, including the Wizengamot vote
yesterday.

“You can get me a face to face with him?” She eventually asked.

“. . . maybe,” she frowned and he held up his hand placatingly, “I’ve invited him to the next
Hogsmeade weekend for a date. I don’t know if he will accept an inquisition from you instead of my
lovely face being attached to his. Also I don’t know if he’ll even be able to attend given what his
schedule is like.”

Hermione glowered. Harry would swear her hair became frizzier the angrier or more irritated she got
and it looked to have grown by at least 75% since she had begun talking to him, “If he won’t meet
me in person you will make sure he gets a letter from me?” She asked thoughtfully.

“As long as it’s not a Howler.” He said and her eye twitched, “. . . He will surprise you. Tom’s a
good person.”

She didn’t say anything for a full minute and all she did was uncross her arms and eyed him
suspiciously, “Are you under the imperius?”

Harry tried not to sigh, he really did, “If I was under the imperius would I be able to tell you I was
under the imperius? I am not, in fact, under the imperius, and I am aware that is exactly what
someone under the imperius would say.”

It was Hermione’s turn to sigh, “At least you’re not under the effect of a love potion.” She muttered.

His brows knitted together, “And how did you determine that?”

Hermione held her wand up from under the table, “Diagnostic spell. Only spell you have going right
now is the privacy charm.”

“There are some spells and potions that can’t be discovered with a diagnostic; the imperius for
example. . .” Harry trailed off before shaking his head, “I have no idea why I’m saying this. I am not
under the imperius or a love potion.” He put his face into his hands and sighed.

They sat in in silence for a few minutes, neither of them willing to fill the void and risk upsetting the
other.
“You should finish your paper,” she said eventually, “You only need to fix a few things and add your closing paragraph.”

Harry nodded, he didn’t want things to be tense between them but he was already concerned that his friendship with Hermione might not survive his relationship with Tom.

There was a small commotion as some of his dormmates entered the library and made their way towards his table, pausing briefly to give Hermione a series of varying looks, from hostile to impassive, before sitting around the table and leaving a gap on each side of the Gryffindor. Theo was on his left and Blaise and Draco his right.

He disabled the privacy spell. Their time for talk was over.

“You’re still working on that bloody potions paper?” Blaise asked, looking over the stained sheet.

Harry sighed and gave Hermione an apologetic smile and shrug, “It’s almost done. Hermione was nice enough to stop me from making a few mistakes.”

His fellow Slytherin’s shifted awkwardly at this minor praise and Harry frowned as she stood and headed into the stacks without a parting word.

Hermione was right just like she always was.

The horrible fact was that most of his classmates would have gotten along with her if she wasn’t a muggleborn; she was smart, cunning, driven, and more. Had Hermione been sorted in Slytherin she would have clawed her way to the top of the house within their first two years. . . if she wasn’t a muggleborn.

“Less than a month until Conclave,” Draco said after moment, a grin on his pointed face, “Since this is will be a historic Conclave, father will be having me attend this upcoming session.”

Theo nodded, unable to hide his eagerness, “I will be attending as well.” He stated baldly and pulled a book from his bag, setting it out on the table and reading.

“Soon we will have a king and we can be a proud nation again.” Draco said with a breathy sigh, “We surely have a majority vote. There’s no way it will fail.” He looked to Harry to see if he would confirm or deny.

Lucius had clearly kept some information from Draco and the blonde boy wanted more. Harry considered telling him now but their agreement was for Draco to know gossip. Not the rest of their roommates. Harry shrugged impassively and pulled his essay closer.

“I don’t understand how you can be so excited to vote to give away your rights and liberties,” came Hermione’s voice from nearby, she was standing near the end of a bookshelf browsing the titles, “Voting a king onto a throne is the same as electing the Minister except you won’t be able to get rid of him.” She grabbed a book off the shelf and flipped through it, ignoring the cold looks.

“Shut up Granger. Your kind wouldn’t understand.” Draco snarled.

Hermione gave Harry an “I told you so” look and walked away, shaking her head.

“I don’t understand how you can be friends with her,” Nott muttered.

Harry pinched the bridge of his nose, when they were alone Draco and Hermione were capable of pretending the other wasn’t present which was close to civility but when there was a larger group it
always escalated quickly, “I don’t need you to understand why Hermione is my friend.” He grumbled.

The table sat in a tense silence as Harry scratched out a sentence of his potions homework and the others quietly gave each other looks.

“Since the two of you didn’t take the train you missed that part of Hogsmeade was cordoned off,” Blaise said, trying to end the silence.

“Someone blew up a house elf on New Years. Auror’s thought there had been a murder. I’m surprised it’s still closed off.” Harry answered without lifting his head.

“They blew up a house elf?” Draco asked, incredulously, “Was it old? That just seems like a waste of money if it wasn’t near death. The bloody things are going for five hundred galleons these days.”

Harry was surprised to hear that; last time it had come up a house elf only cost around a hundred galleons. It had been a few years since the Longbottoms had offered to sell their third house elf to his father, but the inflation should not have gone up that rapidly.

He caught sight of Hermione staring at the table aghast, her cheeks ashen, “The life of a sentient creature is only worth five hundred galleons. How dreadful for you slave owners! Who cares that a living being was blown up!?” She shook her head in disgust and stormed out of the library.

He almost missed that feeling of righteous indignation he used to feel before he had become more complacent with how their society behaved. He must have had it from having a muggleborn mother instead of two pureblood parents.

Hermione had always been vocal with her criticisms when overhearing the Slytherin’s discussing anything of dubious morality and today was no different. Her friendship with Harry had generally saved her the pain of cruel taunts or hexes, and it had opened the way for her to debate some of the more loquacious of the bunch.

Harry suspected that Draco secretly liked their sniping sessions. Not that the blonde would ever admit it.

Draco watched her go and shook his head with a small smile, “Now, imagine if I told her that Octavius Flint has been buying up as many house elves as he can so he can start a studding farm,” he took a sip of water, his grey eyes dark, “he’s trying to get a monopoly.”

“Well, he can’t do that if people still have a breeding pair.” Theo said, perturbed.

“Most don’t. Over the last few years he’s managed to buy the female’s from families that had a breeding pair. No one noticed until about a month ago. I think fathers upset that he didn’t think of it first. The Flint’s will be the only people who can provide a house elf in a few years.” Draco smirked, “It’s a clever move.”

“There’s certainly some people with females still.” The argued, he looked genuinely disturbed by this discussion and Harry felt the same.

Probably for different reasons.

Blaise rubbed his lip with his thumb before deigning to comment, “Interesting, we still have our female but she’s nearly past her breeding age. I doubt my mother will want to buy a male for breeding purposes. The most she’ll do is see if it could be done. . . you know. . . the other way.”
Harry leaned back, his expression mirroring Hermione’s look of disgust. He did not need to know about that there was a different way, or how it was done, and he didn’t want to think about the strange little creatures breeding at all, “I don’t always agree with Hermione but I am beyond uncomfortable with this discussion and frankly disturbed by how much you know about house elf breeding.”

Blaise laughed, “It’s no worse than muggles and their horses! It’s not like we’re tracking pedigrees. Merlin, could you imagine having pedigree’s on house elves?”

Theo snorted, “That’d be like tracking a pedigree on a mudblood. Oh wait. They don’t have any!” He threw back his head and laughed heartily, disturbing a few groups of people further away from them.

The sound of Theo’s mirth ended as Harry’s fist collided with his face. Theo’s nose breaking under the brutality of the blow as he was knocked out of his chair.

Theo sat up, blood pouring from his nose and staining his robes, his face a rictus of shock and rage. Harry remained frozen in his spot, their dormmates eyes flicking between the two, waiting for a wand to be drawn and curses to be thrown.

Whispers had begun to spring up from people who had seen the event.

Harry’s mind was blank with shock but underneath it there was the fire of righteousness. Theo had no right to talk about muggleborns that way; no right to talk about Hermione or his mother like they were less than dirt.

“Potter! What the hell!?” Blaise hissed as he kneeled next to Theo and helped him to his feet. The two of them began to leave the library, Theo glaring at Harry the entire time as they made their way towards the infirmary.

“Harry. . .” Draco whispered, he was paler than usual, clearly surprised by what he considered an unprovoked reaction.

Harry clenched his fists, pain shot up through his knuckle where the skin had split slightly, “He insulted my mother. He insulted Hermione and he insulted me in one simple thoughtless, disgusting comment.”

Draco crossed his arms and looked away, his expression distant, “I hope you don’t start to think of yourself as better than your friends just because of who you are with.” He stated and stalked out of the library, his robes flaring out behind him dramatically.

Harry remained standing there staring at the bloody spot left by Theo long after Draco had left, the library awash with whispers. He didn’t feel remorse for hitting Theo. He had deserved it even if he was just parroting his father’s beliefs. The fact that he had said mudblood in the library of all places, loudly and without thinking . . .

Maybe Hermione was right.

With a sigh, Harry sat down and began working on his potions essay again.

OoOoO

It was so early it was still technically night. The sky was a deep indigo overhead and the first rays of the sun trapped far behind the mountains, but there was just enough light that it stained the eastern sky just a bit lighter. The stars were small streaks of light and the first quarter of the new moon was a
It wasn’t that Harry hadn’t felt safe in his dorm but he had not wanted to deal with the angry silence and plain awkwardness of the situation. Vincent and Greg would have stayed out of it but Blaise was clearly on Nott’s side. Draco was obviously torn by the situation. Knowing that Harry was close to Lord Slytherin had clearly influenced Draco’s behavior. Had he not known Draco would have likely been much more upset about him attacking Theo.

After the library had closed Harry had wandered the halls for an hour, avoiding the prefect patrols with ease, before wandering down to the lake and laying down under the night sky to listen to the sounds of nature. He had a high-powered warming charm on all his clothes and a general heating charm that warmed the area around him to the point that there was no snow within his reach.

There was a sound of snow crunching underfoot as someone approached. He didn’t look. He knew who it would be.

His mother sat down next to him, her side pressed up against his as she entered the warmer area, “I heard from Professor Sinistra that Theo Nott had to go to the infirmary for a broken nose.”

Harry didn’t say anything.

“He wouldn’t say how he got it and when Professor Sinistra went to check with the others, you were nowhere to be found.” She was looking down at him but he couldn’t see her clearly. His glasses were in his hair.

Harry continued to say nothing.

“Apparently, there had been an altercation in the library between some Slytherins.” She added and pushed his glasses down onto his nose. Her green eyes connecting with his, “And now I find you out here at six in the morning.”

He continued his vow of silence.

Lily ran her fingers through his hair, “Sweetie... what’s going on? You’ve never had issues with your dormmates before.”

Even under the warming charm he could see his sigh hanging in the air. They both knew he had had issues with his dormmates before, he had just never told her about them, “He was being an ass and I reacted without thinking. That’s it. Decided I needed to clear my head.”

She briefly paused stroking his hair, “You’ve had enough time to clear your head. It’s time to come back inside. If you want you can sleep on the couch in my quarters,” She clicked her tongue and gestured for him to get up.

They both climbed to the feet and returned to the castle and Lily’s quarters in a companionable silence. She never pressed and he was thankful for it.

When Harry woke his mother had already left. The clock above the fireplace read that it was a quarter past nine and he reluctantly climbed off his makeshift bed and out of her rooms. It was Sunday so breakfast was running later than usual, he began making his way towards the Great Hall since he had missed dinner.

Already he could see people whispering about him; A group of Ravenclaws had stared at him and
whispered among themselves; a first year Hufflepuff boy gasped and ran out of his way when they
had crossed paths. Even Ronald bloody Weasley had looked like he had been about to say
something when Harry had brushed past him and his dormmates talking.

It was frowned upon for members of Slytherin to fight with each other in public. Harry suspected
that he would face some ostracization within the house until he apologized or Nott got vengeance.

As he walked through the doors of the Great Hall most of the students who were still eating looked
at him before turning to a friend and talking.

Slytherin’s had had fights in the past but Harry could not understand how this one simple fight had
brought so much attention to him. Thankfully most of the population had already eaten and it was a
bit more depopulated than it would be on Monday morning before classes.

He trudged to his spot and sat down heavily, throwing his bag onto the floor.

Today was not going to be a good day. Harry knew it in his bones.

As he was pouring himself a glass of pumpkin juice, a discarded Daily Prophet next to Pansy
Parkinson’s turned back caught his eye. There was a picture of Tom on the front.

“Pansy?”

She turned and smirked at him, “Yes Harry?” Her voice was saccharine. She had never spoken
sweetly to him before.

“What can I borrow that?” He pointed to it, feeling trepidation grow.

“Sure thing, loverboy.” She tossed it to him with a smile.

Harry read the headline.

Harry swore.

hythed

Tom ignored the newspaper that sat in the middle of the table. He ignored Ulysses Nott’s beady rage
filled eyes and he ignored Octavius Flint’s pinched expression. His focus was entirely on Avery with
his milky white eyes and his feigned smile of benevolence.

Avery had been the one to find and approach him with the idea for Tom to use his Slytherin heritage
as a bid for kingship. He had been the one that had disagreed with Flint and Nott’s thieving and he
was the only one who didn’t seem to be remotely concerned by the newspaper. He just wore that
small uncanny smile.

Avery had become a spider, someone that Harry emulated to a lesser extent, he thrived on secrets
and would wait and plan for years, decades even. Avery could start or end a feud with a few words,
break a politician. . . or make a king.

It was what Tom could have been if he hadn’t been born a halfblood from a disgraced house.

Flint was the one to break the silence, “I honestly don’t care that you’re playing with another
halfblood. I am concerned that you may have grown careless,” He tapped the paper, “Skeeter should
not have discovered this.”

Tom nodded but said nothing, he wasn’t quoted in the article after all.
“At this point it is merely speculation on Skeeter’s behalf and the Prophet can be forced to print a retraction if we lean on them.” Flint added.

“No need for that,” Avery said in a soft, yet cheerful voice. It was unsettling, Tom knew Avery would use the same tone with someone being skinned in front of him, “It would look poorly to have a retraction printed when the article is in fact true. I say we embrace the situation.” Avery’s unseeing eyes focused on Tom, “I want you to do an interview where you discuss Skeeter’s article and your relationship.”

“No,” Nott’s fist slammed down on the table, upsetting Tom’s wine glass which spilled its contents across the table and rolled onto the floor shattering to pieces, “Potter is a filthy halfblood menace; he attacked my son yesterday and now his presence is staining what should be the beginning of a new era of pureblood wizardry!”

Tom raised a perfectly sculpted brow and leaned back into his chair wondering why Harry had attacked Ulysses’ progeny. The brat probably deserved it.

A house elf had popped into the room and was cleaning up the shattered glass and the table. It was old and hideous, but it knew it’s place, it made no eye contact with any of the men in the room and ignored the fact that Tom was watching it. Avery had clearly owned it since before they had graduated Hogwarts.

“Riddle needs to get rid of the halfblood. We should wipe out the entire line. . .” Nott panted, his chest heaving with barely contained rage.

The other three remained silent. Nott had always been dangerously unbalanced and it had grown worse over time. He refused to understand that for there to be a ruling class, there needed to be something for them to rule. Nott would need to be removed but with his son still in school it would create a vacancy during Conclave. A vacancy that they could not afford.

Tom would have to wait until after the Conclave and likely after he was crowned to kill Ulysses Nott.

“Jezzer, please pour Lord Slytherin a new glass of wine.” Avery commanded and soon there was a fresh glass at his elbow, “Ulysses, the proverbial cat is out of the bag. We will use the good will from Thomas associating with a halfblood to further our cause. You will not harm the boy.” His voice had gone from kindly to threatening with the drop of a wand.

Nott and Flint had leverage over Tom but they had no such thing against Avery. He knew where the bodies were buried, they would have to obey.

“Thomas, have someone arrange the interview. Either today or tomorrow. We do not want too much speculation.”

Tom sighed and took a sip of wine, warmth traveling through his body. Harry caused problems but he felt that the younger man was worth it, “Fine.”

The Sunday Prophet remained sitting in the center of the table, wine staining the side with him on it but leaving Harry untouched. The picture was a candid moment of when he had been brushing Harry’s hair back to look at his neck. The Harry within the image was leaning into the touch but looking up at the headline with a mischievous smile.

**LORD SLYTHERIN COURTING HOGWARTS STUDENT**

How someone had gotten the picture of them during that all to brief meeting during the Wizengamot
session was beyond him. There had been no one else in hallway . . .

Chapter End Notes

Ahhh so sorry for the delay. I got hit with a whammy of a cold that left me incapacitated for about 5 days. Thank you for all your continued support <3
Chapter 10

**LORD SLYTHERIN COURTING HOGWARTS STUDENT**
A Rita Skeeter Exclusive

The first time I had heard of Harry Potter it was during a cloudy October morning. I was in a small village just outside of York, conducting an interview with the prestigious Lord Thomas Slytherin. We had discussed many aspects of what his, currently theoretical, reign would be like.

When I had asked who would be amongst his retinue, Lord Slytherin’s eyes had softened and a small smile emerged, transforming his normally stoic face. I will admit it was the first time I had seen him like so and it is clear now that our King to be was interested in Harry Potter in something that was not entirely professional.

On that October morn we spoke shortly of the young Hogwarts student and how he had reached out to Lord Slytherin after a chance encounter during a Midsummer celebration.

I will admit I put Harry Potter out of my mind. I didn’t notice him at the Lansdowne Palace Yule Ball, I didn’t notice him dancing with Lord Slytherin, nor did I notice Lord Slytherin walking a clearly inebriated Harry Potter towards a fireplace. My assistant was the one who noticed these and I failed you all as a journalist. I apologize to the people of Britain for my failures and I will not let you down again.

During the January 2nd Wizengamot session last Friday, Harry Potter and a fellow schoolmate were spotted amongst the crowd instead of on the Hogwarts express which was currently speeding north to Scotland. Students skipping the train is not a new practice, but skipping the train for a Wizengamot session?

Completely unheard of.

Before the Wizengamot was called into session Harry Potter confessed a variety of things; such as growing tensions between him and his father, head auror, James Potter. When pressed Harry Potter admitted that the tension was caused by his relationship with Lord Slytherin.

Initially, I thought nothing of it; the Potter family has historically not supported having a king, but was I in for a surprise when young Harry explicitly stated that he and Lord Slytherin were involved as more than just friends; that James Potter had discovered them in a compromising situation during the Lansdowne Yule Ball; that young Harry Potter had been invited to a private gathering of Lord Slytherin’s closest friends on new years eve.

I considered these the mad ramblings of a Hogwarts student desperate for attention when I first heard them. How could anyone have missed this?

I was proven wrong when during a session break Harry Potter and Lord Slytherin found one another deep in the hallways of the ministry for a secret tête-à-tête. (pictured above)

So, now I ask myself and I ask all my readers; is Harry Potter worthy of our potential monarch? Will he be able to overcome the pressure of his family to be an asset to Lord Slytherin?

I suppose only time will tell.

oOoOo
Harry had spent most of his Sunday hidden away in the Room of Requirement, avoiding the attention of the other students, as well as his mother.

The article was constantly on his mind and he did not need to think about the article. He did not need to think about Tom seeing it. He did not need to think of his mother seeing it after his fight with Nott. He did not need to think of his father reading and probably getting questioned about it at work. Barty Crouch Sr pulling James aside to ask him about his loyalties.

Harry didn’t want to think about them and he didn’t want to think about everyone who would be watching because of one nosy witch.

Eleven hours spent laying in an overly extravagant bed; either catching up on his sleep or moping during those brief moments he had woken up to the reality of his situation.

Everything had become so complicated. What should he do if anyone asked about him and Tom? Should he deny the relationship? He didn’t know what he should say and he wasn’t able to talk to Tom about it. The thought of sneaking down to the owlery, even with his invisibility cloak on, made him feel sick to his stomach. He didn’t want to talk to or see anybody.

Tom wouldn’t blame him for the article at least; Tom was logical and wouldn’t react emotionally. Harry ignored the intrusive thought that reminded him of the fact that he had behaved poorly yesterday.

Harry turned his mind to a more pressing matter; how had Skeeter managed to overhear nearly all his conversation with Draco. He had put up numerous anti-eavesdropping charms when they had been discussing his relationship with Tom, and they had been completely alone in the hallway where that picture was taken. She had somehow overheard him speaking to Draco and then scarpered off to find her photographer.

It would not be a surprise to discover her photographer had a demiguise fur invisibility cloak. It was the only answer to that question. It was Rita going unnoticed by Harry and Draco in a busy gathering and managing to break his anti-eavesdropping charms.

It had always been clear that Skeeter didn’t practice ethical journalism, but now, with Harry being the subject of one of her articles he wanted to find out how the bint had done it and take her down.

Once it grew closer to dinner and he knew that most of the school would be in the Great Hall eating dinner, he donned his invisibility cloak and made his way to the dungeons and stumbled through the common room and down into the Slytherin dorms.

He stood on the landing and stared blankly at the wooden, ebony door in front of him. He didn’t want to deal with Nott, or Draco, or even Blaise. He wanted to go home and just hide away for a month or two. Yes, it was likely that all of them were at dinner but one could be just on the other side, waiting for him.

Their shared room was high up on the spiral staircase since they were seventh years, first years were at bottom and would work their way up. It was a perfect example of the Slytherin hierarchy; Harry had done his time and climbed his way to the top of their little fishbowl. He had high grades and the other houses tolerated, or even liked him in some cases, but right now in Slytherin he was at the bottom of the lake, even below the first years because he had attacked a fellow Slytherin in a public place.

Harry let his head fall against the door and sighed heavily. He didn’t know what to do and frankly, didn’t want to deal with these problems. Even if he had caused them.
He pushed the door open to a room devoid of people. Relief flooded his veins and he stepped into the room, lighting the brazier with a flick of his wand. It didn’t look like his desk had been sabotaged, but the curtains around his bed were drawn shut, unlike the other beds in the room.

Harry began to catalogue the spells he could use to check if there was a jinx, hex, curse, or even a creature on his bed, but a quiet sound of paper rustling from behind his curtain pulled him from his thoughts.

Someone was on his bed.

Someone was on his bed reading what could only be one of his journals.

His blood ran cold before turning into rage, fiery rage that flooded his veins. That someone would dare to invade his personal space and privacy. The only one who would be so brazen to do so would be Blaise and Harry had passed him on his way down.

With a shaking hand, he grabbed the green velvet curtains and ripped them open, wand out and ready to curse the interloper into the next millennium.

The curse died on his lips as he took in the sight; sitting back against the headboard, and reading a book was Tom.

Harry stumbled backwards, his wand clattering to the floor and the back of his legs hitting the edge of Draco’s bed. He abruptly sat down and stared at the older man.

He had no words. Of all the things, he had expected behind those curtains, Tom wasn’t even on the list.

Tom smiled at him, his red eyes glittering with amusement at Harry’s confusion, which was expounded on by what Tom was wearing. Harry didn’t think he had ever seen the man not in full robes, but here Tom was on Harry’s bed wearing a pair of black slacks, a white dress shirt, and a beautifully cut black vest.

He looked good in muggle attire.

“And I thought you’d be happy to see me.” Tom said, turning back to the book and flicking to a new page.

Harry pushed his glasses up into his hair and rubbed his eyes, “I’m not hallucinating?”

The only response he received was a derisive snort.

Questions swarmed in his mind like pixies that had gotten into the Lovegood family garden and eaten all of the very questionable plants; he stared blankly at Tom until his sleep deprived brain latched onto just what book Tom was perusing.

It was his research journal about Tom.

The one he had painstakingly bespelled so only he could open it and if someone tried to circumvent the protections it would be very bad for them.

The damn thing was also in code and Tom was flipping through it like it was the Prophet.

“Tom. . . are you just pretending to read that?” Harry hoped that was the case, there had been some rather inflammatory comments near the beginning. His eyes widened, remembering that even if Tom
couldn’t read it he had probably seen the photo from the newspaper that Harry had drawn devil horns on.

“Unfortunately for you, I am familiar with ogham. I will say, I am impressed by your paranoia of also using a transposition cipher. It took me close to twenty minutes to decipher your code,” Tom put the book down on the bed, his full attention on Harry finally, “That was a nasty little curse you put on the book. Consider me impressed.”

Harry flushed, “Arthur Weasley told my dad about someone who was cursing muggle coins to do that. I kept the sensation of needles being pushed into the nailbeds, but removed the part that would get me expelled.

Tom’s mouth twitched upwards slightly, as if he had found that amusing and Harry briefly wondered if it had been Tom who had cursed the coins, “Interesting. As much as I would like to discuss your note’s on myself, and I would, I’ve come here for another re—“

Harry pointed at Tom, cutting him off, “And just how are you here? You couldn’t have gotten Dumbledore’s permission. . . Are you actually someone under polyjuice?” He asked while reaching to the floor for his wand.

Tom snorted, “I don’t let people close enough to get pieces of me. I do appreciate your newfound paranoia. Fortunately, I am not Rita Skeeter. I have much better fashion sense. Acid green and bejeweled glasses are not my style.

Harry squinted, “What did I get you for your birthday?”

“No idea. Haven’t had the chance to open it yet. It’s still in my desk drawer.”

Harry tried not to feel hurt, it had been a bloody thoughtful gift and he deserved to be praised for being so thoughtful “Why not?”

“We’re getting off topic.” Tom said trying to steer the conversation.

“We were never on topic.” Harry countered.

“Well, we’re getting on topic now,” Tom stated firmly, leaving no room for argument, his red eyes glittering dangerously, “I will be doing an interview with Skeeter tonight about my relationship status. I will be discussing you and how we met. I hope you do not mind but it must be done before rampant speculation goes wild. I shudder to think about what’s happening over at Witch Weekly.”

Harry mouth open and closed wordlessly for a moment before he shut it tight, “You’re going to tell her that I was researching you?”

“Indeed. I will attempt to have a transcript sent over before so you can see it,” Tom looked at his nails briefly, “No promises. As I understand it they are holding up the presses waiting for me.”

“Oh.” Harry looked blankly at the flames flickering in the brazier. So that was all going to come into the light.

They sat in silence for a minute before Tom asked, “May I ask what happened between your family and Ulysses Nott?”

“What? Why?”

“He has an intense desire to wipe your bloodline out and has stated so multiple times.” He stated
Harry’s jaw tensed, not out of fear but anger, “He has?”

Tom hadn’t looked up from the book, he just turned to another page, “Indeed. He hates you but seems to loathe your mother even more. I suppose it’s more than her blood status.”

Harry didn’t like how Tom just nonchalantly stated that but he told him anyways, “When the potions job opened up he tried to stop my mother from getting the position because she’s a muggleborn. I heard from Vincent that Dumbledore told Nott that if he really had an issue with Lily teaching his son then he should either ship him off to Durmstang or home school him. Outside of potions there are no muggleborns teaching a core curriculum subject. Any other mugleborn taught classes are electives.”

God, Hermione was so right about the pureblood bigotry. . .

Tom nodded, his lips pressed into a thin line as he processed the information, “I can see why that would raise Ulysses hackles. Well, if you are in the same room as him at some point in the future I suggest that you leave the area. I am unable to do anything about him until after conclave.” Tom put the book down and swung his legs over the edge of the bed, mirroring Harry’s position and pose.

“. . . Are you going to imperio him or kill him?” Harry asked, his mouth going dry.

Tom smiled, and it wasn’t a nice smile, it was cold and cruel and it transformed his face into someone that Harry only recognized from a painting. When Tom spoke it was low and ragged, his breath caught in his throat, “I mean I will slowly eviscerate him, heal him back together and do it again for him having the nerve to threaten you and yours. Eventually he will die.” Tom reached over and grasped Harry’s jaw, his touch gentle and soft.

Harry pressed his cheek into the touch, his heart thumping in his chest, “. . . Oh.”

Tom brushed his thumb across Harry’s cheek before releasing him and they sat in silence before Harry remembered that Tom had changed the subject earlier, “How did you get in?”

“I am the heir of Slytherin. One quarter of Hogwarts is technically mine.” Tom stated.

Harry gave him a deadpan expression of incredulity, “That’s stupid and a lie.”

He bit back a chuckle, his face once again the softer and kinder Tom that Harry was far more comfortable with, “Apparated into the forest and walked in while disillusioned. Parseltongue can open the common room.”

“I’m surprised you didn’t use one of the secret tunnels,” Harry said as leaned back on his elbows and stretched his legs. There were so many of them that Hogwarts was more a sieve than a castle.

“Too long. The one inside the one-eyed witch statue is almost an hour walk if you start in Hogsmeade, and trying to apparate halfway down the passage just outside the wards is a wonderful way to get splinched.”

Harry was impressed, he didn’t know anyone outside of his father and his friends that knew that one, “That’s the one that ends in Honeyduke’s basement?”

“Did you discover it in your quest to find the Chamber and out my secret family history?” Tom sounded equally impressed that Harry had known about it. The one-eyed witch was a tricky one apparently.
Harry cocked his head to the side and shook his head, “I’ve known about that one since before I started school. My dad told me about it and said I could become popular in Gryffindor by sneaking into Honeydukes and nicking some of the candy.”

“An auror advocating theft. Tut, tut.” Tom said gravely and shook his head, “I am truly afraid of the state of the wizarding world if out head auror promotes theft from a small local business. For shame.”

Harry snorted at Tom’s little act, “I think the Gryffindor’s would be more impressed if I snuck a multi course dinner up from the kitchens.”

“I assume the main course would be a roasted boar with an apple in its mouth?” Tom’s face was alight with good humour and Harry found it absolutely beautiful. Tom was beautiful in the first place but when he smiled... it was so much better.

“Exactly.”

They sat in companionable silence, the only sound was the occasional crackle of fire in the brazier. Harry didn’t think he had ever felt this comfortable with someone before, to just sit in silence. Tom was special and Tom was his.

Tom ran his fingers through his hair and watched Harry for a moment, a sad smile on his lips, “I wish I could kidnap you away for a few hours and have my wicked way with you.” Tom sighed, “Instead I bring you warnings of ill will and the fact that our relationship is going to be in the public eye... I am sorry.”

Harry shrugged, trying to ignore his nervousness from earlier, “I knew that would happen at one point, and I will deal with Theo... Maybe that will get his father’s sights off me.”

Tom didn’t say anything, but Harry knew the look. It was clear that getting on Theo’s good side would not help the situation with Nott Sr., “I still have to live with Theo for a few more months. Best to do it on terms that are survivable. He’s not the highest in the pecking order anyways.”

“I assume Draco Malfoy is at the top of your little social structure?”

“Yeah, then Blaise, Theo and I were—were on the same level, Vince and Greg a step below. I might be on the same level as Vince and Greg now or below.” Harry frowned, “I could end up a pariah. Fun.”

Tom raised an eyebrow at Harry. It was an accusing eyebrow. A questioning brow. This brow had opinions and none of them were complimentary of what had just been said.

“What?” Harry asked defensively, feeling the accusatory nature of that silent eyebrow. It said no words but Harry knew that brow thought he was being stupid.

“Despite your conflict with Nott, you are dating me. That does pull some weight.”

Harry shook his head and smiled a smile with no joy behind it, “I still attacked a fellow Slytherin in public for making a rude comment about muggleborns.”

“Ah. So, that’s why that happened. Interesting. Tell me Harry dearest...” Tom got up, pushed Harry so he was laying flat on Draco’s bed and straddled him, Tom’s arse against his groin, “what if they come to believe you were acting on the order of your soon to be king?” Tom pushed Harry’s hair back, away from his face and smiled.

Harry’s breathe caught in his throat and he laid there, his hands grasping Tom’s hips, his eyes wide
and lips parted. He had not expected this but was suddenly filled with excitement. The potential of being caught in this compromising position with Tom sent a shot of arousal straight to his groin.

Tom clearly knew what had happened, he rocked his hips against Harry as he lent down to gently kiss him, “I don’t think you have to fear for your standing. Any Slytherin with half a brain would realize the King’s consort must not be seen associating with someone who makes such . . . disparaging comments,” his lips brushed against Harry’s ear as he spoke.

There was a moment of warning where they could hear approaching footsteps. Harry had attempted to sit up but Tom remained firmly on top of him, pinning him down, as the door creaked open and Blaise entered the room, and stopped when he realized just who was on Harry, “Oh Morgana.”

“Zabini move!” Draco commanded from behind the taller boy and pushed past him before coming to a halt at the sight of Lord Slytherin straddling Harry, on his bed, “M—m—My Lord!” Draco choked out and bowed low hoping to avoid looking at the compromising situation in front of him.

Blaise followed suit and bowed to Thomas who had still not moved off his furiously red and struggling perch that was attempting to wiggle out from beneath him. It was obvious that he was more than happy to remain sitting on top of Harry for a long time.

“I will hex you if you don’t get off me!” Harry angrily whispered to his captor, jabbing his wand into Tom’s thigh and burning a hole through his pants.

“Fine, be difficult,” Tom muttered and got up, allowing Harry to scramble off Draco’s bed and to his own where he sat, hoping to avoid drawing attention to his groinal region.

Tom had pulled out Harry’s desk chair and sat facing Draco and Blaise who had stood up straight but were looking at the floor, shooting an occasional glance at Harry.

Well, Draco was sending glances, Blaise was openly looking at the violently red Harry.

Tom allowed the silence to stretch for an uncomfortably long time. Draco and Blaise were shifting their feet and Harry was muttering curses. Any thrill from being caught in the act have been violently crushed, destroyed, demolished, utterly bifurcated and then burned with fiendfyre. Harry vowed to not get caught in a position like that again.

He remained in Harry’s chair looking at the two purebloods and not saying a word, allowing his eyes to wander around the room and the other boys.

The door opened again and Theo and Vince came into the room, they paused seeing Draco and Blaise immobile and looked to Harry, and were surprised to see the future king sitting nearby.

Red eyes locked onto Theo who bowed and diverted his gaze. Tom looked the younger man up and down, trying to see how this meek looking boy had caused such an acerbic reaction from Harry. Theodore Nott could be molded into something much more agreeable than Ulysses ever was.

Tom smirked, “Well, this was an interesting meeting,” he leant over to Harry and kissed his cheek, “I’ll let you know if anything pertinent happens with Skeeter. Good night.” And he was up and out of the room leaving Harry alone with his roommates.

They were all exchanging glances trying to communicate with only pointed looks. Eventually, Blaise spoke up, his soft voice slightly teasing, “I see the Prophet was accurate with their report. Draco spent the better part off today denying it. I assume for deniability. . .”

Harry hid his face in his hands; avoiding the horrified look of Draco, the smug countenance of
Blaise, and Theo’s blank, calculating expression, “Yes. It was true.” He would have to thank Draco later.

“He’s much prettier in person.” Vincent said and walked to his bed, ignoring his roommates whose heads had whipped around at break neck speed to stare at him, “The pictures never translate how red his eyes are,” he smiled brightly at Harry, “Congratulations Harry, I think you make a nice couple.” With that he grabbed his toiletries and went to the bathroom.

“Huh. . . You think you know a guy.” Blaise muttered, dropping onto the bed and kicking his shoes off.

Theo was looking at Harry, appraising him and his status, a small frown on his lips. Theo shook his head before grabbing his toiletries and heading to the bathroom.

Harry still didn’t know what to say, or if he should say anything to Theo. Whatever he would have to do with Theo would have to be just the two of them. Not in public where either of them could lose face.

“Harry. . .” said a grey faced Draco, his hand shaking slightly, “please don’t do anything like that on my bed.”

Blaise laughed.

Harry bit his lip and shook his head, “We didn’t do anything on your bed. We didn’t do anything. I was just sitting on your bed because he was hogging mine.”

“He was on top of you!” Draco screeched, his tone just shy of shattering Harry’s glasses.

“That happened like right before you came in!”

Blaise had walked around the room and put a hand on Harry’s shoulder, “Potter, you were pitching a tent. There was nothing innocent going on there.”

Harry nearly bit through his lip and focused on the book Tom had been reading, he would never live this down, given how furiously he was blushing at the moment he suspected his nickname would be Weasley for a few weeks. “That doesn’t mean anything was happening on Draco’s bed. He was just really close and….” He shook his head violently, “I won’t do anything on your bed. I swear.”

“Good!” Draco trotted around to his desk, muttering about disgusting roommates.

Blaise sat next to Harry, his arm wrapping around him in a much more intimate way than Harry had ever experienced from Blaise, “I think we should amend that statement. You won’t do anything on his bed anymore. Ah, remember that night we christened that bed? Good times. Three hours straight.” Blaise said wistfully, “So many bodily fluids.”

Harry bit back a chuckle. Apparently, he was back in some people’s good graces, “Well, we started on Draco’s bed. Made our way around the room. Christened everything. I remember hearing a house elf scream after we finished in the room.”

Draco’s eyes widened so far, they nearly popped out, “You didn’t!”

“And then there was that time you smuggled down that pretty boy Hufflepuff and I walked in on you in Draco’s bed!” Blaise reminisced fondly, “That was a sight to behold.”

“I forgot that you walked in. Would have been a steamy threesome.” Harry winked at Blaise. It was
so much fun to wind Draco up, given his explosive personality.

“No! You’re lying!” Draco cried, his face so pale it almost matched his hair.

“You have the best bed, you know how it is. What’s yours is ours when you’re not around,” Harry turned to Blaise, “Remember that time Ronald Weasley paid you to smuggle out Draco’s toothbrush so he could lick it?”

Blaise nodded, a shudder racking his body, “But I don’t think he licked it. Pretty sure he dipped it in the loo. I feel horrible for doing that. It was too far,” He sniffed dramatically and wiped his eyes.

“You didn’t. You’re lying.” Draco whispered, murder on his face.

Blaise and Harry shared a long look before both breaking into peals of laughter, Harry falling back onto his bed, laughing out all the stress and anxiety and sheer terror he had been feeling for the past day.

Blaise had fallen onto the floor laughing, pointing at Draco’s enraged expression, “By Merlin’s sack, we had you going!”

Harry snorted, “Like Ronald Weasley would even talk to one of us just to get your toothbrush!”

“You’re both ponces!” Draco shot a stinging hex at the two of them and stormed out of the room, robes flaring out behind him.

Harry laid back on his bed, the occasional giggle slipping past his lips. He felt better. Just one visit from Tom had turned his day around. His standing was restored in Slytherin house; the girls would surely hear about it soon and they would be able to filter it amongst the rest of the house.

Now, all that was left to do was to deal with the rest of the school knowing about his relationship with Tom.

And maybe let his parents know about the interview Tom was having with Skeeter.

Ugh. Skeeter.

He would take her down.
He cursed the impulsive nature of Lord Thomas Slytherin. The impulsive and irrational nature of Lord Thomas Slytherin. Back when he had been Tom Riddle, or later, when he was some unnamed dark wizard, he had never been illogical or driven by brash, unexplainable emotions like pining for a seventeen-year-old halfblood, much less letting said seventeen-year-old halfblood know so much about his past, and his plans, whatever tenuous, irrational, "insane" plans they may be . . .

And now he was trapped, unable to interact, to warn, advise, or eliminate threats. How was he supposed to prevent Lord Thomas-bloody-Slytherin from making so many mistakes if he was wrapped in somus paper and shoved in the back of a vault like some forgotten relic?!

He paced within his frame, hand pushing off from edge before launching himself in the other direction. He had raged, he had screamed, and he had attempted to use the protective magics he had been granted but he had been ignored.

How many hours, how many days had he spent trapped within this wretched painting? Confined in this infernal library with nothing to do; the books were decoration; there was no point in creating runes, or developing arithmancy equations because of the somnus paper blocking any outbound magic, as well as his ability to wander through the other paintings in Riddle Manor.

He could curse himself for not allowing another painting to be made and stored elsewhere; he had nowhere he could escape to.

He did not understand why his counterpart had grown fond of the Potter boy; why he had introduced him to the inner circle, why he had allowed the boy to keep the knowledge of their past, why he had lain with him.

Sex was gratifying and he had enjoyed in the past before he was trapped within the painting. . . back when he was still part of Lord Slytherin, but he had never felt a continued desire to have it with a particular person. He had seen them exchanging fluids once, but who knows what they had been up to since he had been locked inside the vault.

Yes, maybe he had attempted to kill the Potter boy by taking advantage of the protective enchantments that were built into the painting, and it had upset the clearly unbalanced Lord Slytherin into locking his best advisor away, but what was he supposed to do? Let his counterpart run around obeying the whim of a soft halfblood who was unprepared for the realities of a takeover.

He leant against the edge of the painting and crossed his arms, contemplating the problem that was Harry Potter. Lord Slytherin would not tolerate him attempting to kill his paramour again, and he could not tolerate being trapped within this infernal frame for much longer!
As he contemplated using a curse to damage the painting, and force Lord Slytherin to pull him from the somnus paper, the vault opened, and he heard his counterpart speak.

“I imagine it will be fine to publish this in the paper. He is above the age of majority after all. Now, this is where you—“

The vault closed again and he didn’t hear the rest of what Lord Slytherin had to say, and frankly, he didn’t care.

There was a gap, he could see the vault door; and hidden off in the dimensional painting space only he could see, there was an exit to another portrait within the house. Slytherin had brushed against the somnus paper while pulling something out.

He slipped into the landscape in the dining room and began to plot his next meeting with Harry Potter.

OoOoO

Jan 5th

Harry made his way into the Charms classroom, stuffing his invisibility cloak into his bag and tossing his holiday homework on Flitwick’s desk before heading to the back and hiding in the furthest corner of the classroom near the windows and he began to wait for the rest of the class to filter in.

Tom had not gotten back to him with the transcript of the interview and the Prophet had oddly failed to show up during breakfast. Harry was forced to assume that the printing process had been held up by Tom’s meeting with Skeeter. Tom had left Hogwarts rather late in the evening yesterday after all.

But for now, the gossip machine at Hogwarts was churning violently with him as the prime target with his attack on Nott, the Prophet article, and his running out of the Great Hall on Sunday morning.

Pansy had worn the biggest shit eating grin when she had seen him last night. She was enjoying his discomfort far too much.

The gossip was horrible at the moment but hopefully after the article it would be incrementally better. There would be less conjecture at least. Too many people had gawked at him in the Great Hall today which is why he had worn his cloak when heading to the classroom.

Maybe the professors would let him attend classes while invisible.

Hermione was the second to enter the classroom. She sat next to him instead of in the front, as was her norm, and gave him a speculative look, “I heard what happened in the library... Thank you for standing up against Nott,” she reached over and squeezed his arm briefly.

Harry gave her a small smile, “I know where I’m from and even if I’m in a pureblood world I won’t let them forget it.” He really wouldn’t.

“Good,” Hermione pulled her textbook from her bag and began to prepare for class. Harry had always been impressed by her notetaking skills, not that he would tell her that. Last time he had complimented her study guide she had made one for him and tried to force him to follow it.

It did not end well.

“And I believe I owe you an apology for being not believing you about your relationship with Lord
Slytherin.” Hermione stated matter-of-factly as she returned from handing in her homework.

“I believe you do.” He tried not to smirk. He really did.

There was a little puff of breathe before she admitted her fault, “I am sorry I doubted your word. . . in this instance.”

“You are forgiven, my child.” Harry said in a holier-than-thou tone and attempted to do the sign of the cross. He was going to be the bigger person and ignore that little jab at the end. He had been a fan of hyperbole a few times in the past after all.

Hermione snorted at his antics, “You’re such an ass.”

“That I am, but a delightfully pleasant one.” Harry intoned sagely, his hands clasped together in a mock prayer.

“I imagine your ass is the only reason someone like Lord Slytherin would be interested in someone like you.” The sneering tone of Zacharias Smith rang through the room as he strode closer to them. Neither of them had noticed him or his small posse coming into the room and eavesdropping on their conversation.

Hermione opened her mouth ready to berate the Hufflepuff but Harry put a hand on her arm to stop her, “Now, Smith. . . I know you are a growing boy and you probably haven’t learnt of these things yet,” Harry began in a patronizing tone, “but when you reach a certain age and have a certain personality with certain looks, you may gather the attention of the next King of wizarding Britain. Unfortunately for you, I have the right personality and looks and I caught his attention and I can see that you are jealous,” Smith reared back like he had been slapped, “but I will see if I can put in a good word with Lord Slytherin and see if he needs someone to fill in for the house elf when it’s sick. I’m sure you already look forward to cleaning his boots.”

The room was quiet as Smith’s rage percolated, his mousy face grew red and his hands shook as he threw his bag to the ground and drew his wand, “I challenge you to a duel right now!” His wand was pointed at the dead center of Harry’s forehead, a red spark dropping from the end.

Harry nonchalantly raised an eyebrow at Smith. He had been trained by his father and Sirius on proper dueling and proper defence and could easily beat the other boy, “If you wish.” He stood up and drew his wand, “Hermione, you’re my second.”

Hermione pushed out from her seat, “No! Dueling is not allowed! Smith put your wand away and sit down. Harry, you do the same!” She commanded in her best McGonagall impersonation.

Smith’s wand remained pointed at Harry, “And what will you do about it Granger?”

“I’ll give you detention for one,” she snarled and prepared to draw her own wand. Harry knew she was avoiding it out of fear of escalating the situation further.

“It’s alright,” Harry said softly, “Smith is just afraid of losing face. He thought he would be able to come in here and humiliate me, but his friends are with him and now he’s stuck in this persona of false bravado. He could try to duel me and lose, or he could acquiesce to you but ultimately be beholden to the will of a muggleborn female Gryffindor.” he lowered his wand and squeezed Hermione’s shoulder softly. Smith was nothing to be afraid of.

“That’s not true!” Smith snapped, and once again, a burst of sparks flew from his wand, singeing Harry’s robes.
Finch-Fletchey and Macmillan were exchanging looks and Harry knew they were contemplating drawing their wands as well. It was time to stop this before it really started.

“Expelliarmus,” Harry lazily incanted and grabbed Smith’s wand from the air, “There we go. The duel is done and you lost.” He tossed the wand back to Smith, who had grown white with repressed rage. His knuckles were white as he gripped his returned wand.

The door opened and Flitwick entered, holding a stack of papers, “Everyone it’s time to find your seats! Class starts in a few minutes!” Flitwick squeaked as he walked into the classroom and sat at his desk. Other students began to filter in behind the short teacher.

Smith shot Harry a glare, grabbed his bag from the floor and stalked off to the opposite end of the class and sat with his friends who were avoiding eye contact with one another and other students.

Hermione shook her head and sat down, “I can’t believe he had the gall to challenge you to a duel. . .”

“And in front of a prefect too,” Harry said, “He has the darker inclinations of someone from Slytherin but he lacks the cunning and drive.”

Hermione gave him a confused look, “Explain Crabbe and Goyle.”

“They have goals, and they only appear to be thick,” Harry admonished, “It’s something their families arranged years ago. Have your children appear to be stupid and people will reveal their secrets to them, thinking they are too thick to use the information to their advantage. Just wait, twenty years from now the ministry and other pureblood families will be under the thumbs of the Crabbes and the Goyles.”

Hermione raised an eyebrow in an eerily reminiscent imitation of Tom’s opinionated brows, “Will you and Lord Slytherin be under their thumbs?”

“Especially Lord Slytherin and I.” Harry nodded his head sadly while maintaining eye contact.

“Of course. . .” Hermione gave him an unimpressed look.

Harry let out a small snort and pulled his textbook out and prepared for note taking.

The stragglers were coming in and Harry had Blaise sitting in front of Hermione which left the spot in front of Harry for Draco. Nott sat in the general radius of the other Slytherin’s but was brushing up against the Ravenclaws.

Smith would probably end up talking trash about Harry for a bit but it was unlikely to affect Harry’s standing in the other houses. Smith was not well regarded even within Hufflepuff, the nice people house, so there would be little issue caused by their altercation. Zacharias Smith was a good windsock of which way the wind was blowing with the more uninformed general populace.

Within the school there shouldn’t be too many issues or altercations in the future but it was slightly worrying. Harry only had six more months of schooling before he would be released onto the world.

Finger’s snapped in front of his face and Harry lurched back, coming out of his contemplative state. Draco stood in front of him, a handsome owl perched on his shoulder, talons digging into his robes, “This is yours,” Draco drawled and crouched down so the owl could hop off his shoulder and onto Harry’s desk, “The bloody thing couldn’t find you and decided to devil me,” Draco whispered and sat down in front of Harry.
Harry glanced at the owl and then at Flitwick who was writing on the board and had missed Draco bringing the handsome bird into the classroom. Apparently, his invisibility cloak could confuse owls, “You’re Toms, aren’t you?” He asked and softly stroked the top of its head before taking the package and opening it.

It was the article.

Written at the top, in Tom’s precise handwriting, was First Copy. It was still slightly warm to the touch.

He was about to start reading it when Hermione elbowed him lightly and looked pointedly at the owl that was hopping around on his desk impatiently.

Harry got up, sidled to the window and cracked it open enough for the owl to leave and for a cold draft to enter the room.

“Mr. Potter? What are you doing?” Flitwick tittered, standing on his toes, looking at Harry.

“Just needed some air!” Harry said and slammed the window shut before returning to his seat, “Sorry sir.”

Flitwick tutted and began the lesson which Harry promptly began to ignore as he read the article.

**Lord Slytherin Tells All!**

**His Shocking Relationship with Harry Potter and How the Hogwarts Student Stole His Heart! A Groundbreaking Revelation!**

Before me sits Lord Thomas Slytherin; he cuts a handsome profile with high cheekbones, a strong jaw, perfectly coiffed black hair, and his most distinguishing aspect, red eyes. You surely know how he looks from a photograph, but being in his presence is something else entirely. He exudes an aura of power and control that leaves many breathless.

I have many questions for him about his history, and his plans, but I was summoned here today to conduct this interview to delve into the history of Lord Slytherin’s relationship with Hogwarts student, Harry Potter; Hogwarts Student, son of Hogwarts Potion’s master Lily Potter, and Head Auror James Potter.

It is slightly scandalous with Lord Slytherin being seven years older than seventh year Hogwarts student. The age difference is not as horribly drastic as when Queen Calliope took 20-year-old Eugene Templeton as her paramour at the age of 111, but that was six centuries ago and we now live in a more enlightened time where it may be frowned upon to date a someone who has just reached the age of majority.

And I must wonder if we, as the public, would have ever found out of their relationship if it was not for my diligent investigation into the life and activities of Lord Slytherin. So, I asked him.

RS: Lord Slytherin, were you and Mister Potter going to come forward with your relationship at some point?

LS: Yes. Many of my friends are aware of our relationship, as is Harry’s family. We had not had the opportunity to discuss announcing our relationship as it is a recent development in our lives.

RS: Oh? When I interviewed you several months ago you mentioned Harry Potter as someone you would like to have retinue. Were you involved at that point?

LS: No. Harry and I became involved, as you say, roughly a fortnight ago. At the time of that
interview, I was interested in him exclusively as an advisor and strategist.

RS: And what changed?

LS: I am uncertain.

Lord Slytherin had grown distant when I asked him this. I imagine it might be difficult to pinpoint the moment when a political ally evolved into a romantic interest.

RS: In our last interview, you said that you met during a midsummer celebration.

LS: Is that a question? Yes, we met during the midsummer celebration at Versailles. Harry approached me and we spoke briefly.

RS: And did you have contact between your first meeting and this past holiday break?

LS: Through letters. I am not one to go about sneaking onto Hogwarts property.

Harry snorted and glanced up to make sure Flitwick hadn’t heard him. Thankfully he was helping Terry Boot on how to perform the charm

RS: I doubt you would. I imagine it would be difficult for just anyone to be able to grab your attention. What was it that Harry Potter did that garnered your favour?

Lord Slytherin went and retrieved several photos at this point and handed them to me. One was a photograph of Harry Potter in a cavernous, roughhewn room; another with him next to a large statue; and the final was in a small library.

LS: I know through family history what this room is, and it has been searched for since Salazar Slytherin left Hogwarts. Harry Potter has been the first to discover the Chamber of Secrets in a millennium.

I will admit my hands shook slightly as I looked at these images, and Lord Slytherin assured me that these were genuine and that Harry Potter had disclosed where the entrance to the Chamber of Secrets was.

I was certainly surprised by this turn of events but I wonder what drove Harry Potter to discover the Chamber of Secrets.

When I asked Lord Slytherin about the motives of Harry Potter, he, quite brusquely, requested that I keep any speculation to myself and that it was time to move onto a different subject.

On page 5 are the photographs of the Chamber of Secrets and we discuss the upcoming Conclave, and his potential Chocolate Frog Card.

Skeeter must have been kept on a relatively tight leash regarding the contents of the article, there was nothing overly salacious written. Harry closed the newspaper and slid it over to Hermione who had been eyeing it. There was no way he would be able to focus on class. Once the general public read the Prophet there would be less speculation but there would be people asking him about the Chamber of Secrets.

He hadn’t expected Tom to announce that he had found the Chamber to Rita, but then he hadn’t expected it when Tom had told his inner circle.

Unfortunately, it was his only real achievement that Tom could tell anyone about. It wasn’t like Tom
could tell Skeeter or his inner circle that Harry had uncovered that Tom was a descendant of the Gaunts.

Harry would have to do something else now to gain further reputation as a useful partner for Tom. . .

There was the sound of paper being rapidly turned and Harry watched as Hermione turned to page 5 and stared in shock at the pictures and then looked to Harry and then back to the pictures.

He tried not to laugh.

“Miss Granger,” Flitwick was standing a few feet away, eyeing Hermione and the paper speculatively, “Now is not the time for reading. Please practice the avis charm and you can have the paper back after class.”

She whimpered slightly as he walked away with the newspaper. Hermione wouldn’t risk calling further attention to herself again but it was clear she wanted to find out more.

Harry chuckled and began to conjure a small flock of birds.

The Hermione Inquisition could wait.
“HARRY JAMES POTTER!”

Harry had dashed out of the classroom, nearly bowling over the other students, he grabbed the newspaper from Flitwick’s desk as he passed and the smaller man let out an indignant yelp.

Hermione was hot on his heels, he could almost feel her grasp behind him. She had been shooting him a combination of curious and frustrated looks during the entirety of Charms class. He had refused to talk to her and interrupt the lesson. Her curiously was insatiable and even rules could be ignored if she wanted to know something.

“STOP RIGHT NOW! I WILL GIVE YOU DETENTION!” She screamed, running just a few paces behind. It wouldn’t be long before she pulled out her wand and tried to accio him.

But he continued his mad dash through the hallways, taking as many secret passages as possible in an attempt to shake her off. Once he knew he had a small bit of time he ducked into an alcove and donned his invisibility cloak. He stood pressed against the wall, catching his breath when Hermione darted past him. The look on her face could only be described as the self-righteous anger of a Gryffindor on a mission.

There would be trouble when she caught him.

Out of his friends he would owe her an explanation more than the Slytherins. They understood secrets. But first he needed to contact Tom about what he shall have to do when someone asks about the Chamber of Secrets.

Sitting down and explaining it to Hermione would take too long, she would probably willingly skive off class to find out more. A shocking thought indeed. Hopefully she would give up on finding then hexing him into giving answers and head to History of Magic.

Harry crouched low on the floor, pulled out a quill and a piece of parchment, and under the cover of his cloak, dashed off a quick letter to Tom. He waited a few minutes in case Hermione decided to backtrack before heading off to the owlery.

The bell rang announcing the start of second period classes as he reached the front doors, and Harry pulled off his cloak and shoved it into his bag. He had no desire for some teacher or student to look out a window and see a set of footprints appear in the snow and wonder where they came from. There was no way he wanted to lose this cloak, it was too valuable

Although, he wasn’t above begging his mother to get it back. Literal on his knees begging. There would be tears. Lots of tears.

He pulled the castle door open and began his trek across the snow-covered grounds. The cold January wind seemingly trying to push him back towards Hogwarts. Harry ignored the biting chill that penetrated him to his core and climbed the icy stairs. He slipped once at the top, nearly losing his footing, “What’s the point of Filch if he doesn’t do anything?” He muttered angrily and pushed the door open, making his way through the piles of droppings and mouse bones to Eris.

“Hello sweetie,” he whispered as she landed in front of him and gave a small hoot. “I need you to
She nibbled his fingers affectionately before proffering a leg. Harry put his bag on his feet and pulled the note out and stared at it.

He didn’t know what Tom wanted exactly. Would Tom want him to prove that he actually knew the location of the Chamber of Secrets? Would he want him to tell people where to find it or how to? Why hadn’t Tom said anything else other than telling him it was the first copy of the paper?

Was this a test? Was Tom testing him to make sure he represented Tom’s best interests without any guidance? What did he want?!

Eris hooted impatiently at him and Harry felt the letter shake slightly in his hand. What was he supposed to do? Tom trusted him. Harry knew his biggest secrets; he knew Tom was a halfblood descended from the Gaunts; He knew that he was much, much older then he looked; that he hated the purebloods. Why would Tom test him like this?

The slamming of the owlery door pulled Harry from his panicked thoughts. Before him was an angry, sweaty Hermione Granger. She lurched towards him, wand in hand and brow furrowed, “Harry-James-Potter,” she growled, “I-searched-the-entire-school.”

Harry gulped visibly as she approached, “Oh? The entire school? You found the Chamber of Secrets too?”

Beads of sweat dripped off her forehead and onto the tip of her nose despite the overwhelming chill of January, “I am going to hex you into the afterlife,” her wand was under his nose and he worried about the penetrative aspects of it entering his brain.

He had never gotten a clear answer on how well magic could cure brain injuries

Harry smiled weakly, “I think it’d be better if you didn’t. I just need to send a letter and then I guess I will give you answers. . . Will you be okay with skipping History of Magic?” If he tried to run again she would give him detention, hex him and sit on him until he told. He needed to not get on her bad side again.

Hermione chewed her lip for a second, “I read ahead,” She lowered her wand and stood back, waiting for him to send the letter.

The letter felt heavy in his hand. Tom wasn’t the type of person to forget to give instructions. This was a test. One he would pass.

He burned the letter.

“Sorry Eris. Changed my mind” He stroked the top of her head before she nipped his finger, drawing blood. She was a temperamental bird but he loved her despite it.

Hermione raised an eyebrow, “What in Merlin’s name was that about?”

He turned from and brushed past her for the door, “Let’s talk in the Room of Requirement. . .”

The pair made their way down from the owlery, traversed the snowy field and through the hallways up to the seventh-floor corridor where Harry paced across from the tapestry of Barnabas the Barmy. Once the door appeared they slid into the room.

Harry paused as he entered. Normally it would take on the appearance of his home, a place he found
comfortable and safe, but now it was Lord Slytherin’s study. The fireplace, chairs, books, artifacts, and the desk were all just as it had been in Tom’s actual home.

He tried not to blush at the sight of the desk. This room was already creating fond memories.

Hermione was looking around the room, she had been to his home and knew it was not like this. She was quiet as she touched the book spines and observed the dark artifacts, “This is Lord Slytherin’s home? It’s very dark . . .”

He took her hand and guided her to the seats near the fire, ignoring the double meaning of her words, “Let’s not get distracted,” Hermione was too observant at times. One day she’d notice something that would get him in trouble.

She sat down with a thump and curled her legs underneath her, “Did you actually find the Chamber of Secrets?”

“Yes”

“When?”

“Near the end of October.”

“Where is it?”

“I don’t feel comfortable telling you that.”

“. . . It has to be opened with parseltongue doesn’t it? That’s why you had those snakes. You were listening to them.”

Harry paled slightly but nodded, “It might be best if you don’t share that information.”

“Guarantee me a chance to speak to Lord Slytherin on the next Hogsmeade visit.”

“I’ll see what I can arrange.”

For almost an hour Hermione asked him about what the inside of the Chamber of Secrets looked like and the ancient library hidden within. He had no answers about the mythical monster within since he had not found it and had not thought to ask Tom about it. Whatever it was, it was probably dead after centuries of no food.

Merlin. . . he hoped it was dead.

So, he detailed the ancient books that were written in Latin or old English that he could barely decipher. Some in scripts or runes he had never seen before. He told her about the statue of Slytherin. He told her that maybe he would return and take more pictures with Lord Slytherin’s permission. He told her that, no he would not take her down there to raid the library and that she could ask Lord Slytherin when they met. He doubted Tom would acquiesce to that request but the man consistently surprised him.

He did not tell her the exact reasoning behind his search for the room. Getting under Tom’s skin is no longer an acceptable reason since they started dating.

Eventually their conversation lulled into a comfortable silence. Hermione was still curled up in her chair, hand gently holding her chin as she contemplated what Harry had told her, “People have been searching for the Chamber for a thousand years. The founders searched for it after Slytherin left. I
wouldn’t be surprised if Merlin himself searched for it. How did you find it? I know you and Draco would wander around looking for it and other secrets but you haven’t done that in ages. How did you find it?"

Harry steeped his fingers in front of him and gave her a solemn look, “Hermione Jean Granger. You ask for my secrets and then imply that I am not as great as Merlin or the Founders? I am hurt. I did something that no one else has done in a thousand years. I am better than the founders and Merlin and soon everyone will know my name. They’ll talk to their children and say, ‘For Harry Potter’s sake, drop that niffler!’”

Hermione maintained a stoic expression before her façade cracked and she snorted, giggled, then finally, broke out into hysterical laughter. Tears in the corners of her eyes as she cackled. She pointed her finger at him and just laughed and laughed.

It wasn’t ten seconds before he began to laugh. They continued for almost two minutes before it petered down and would giggle when they made eye contact.

She eventually held up a hand and refrained from looking at him lest she laugh again, “I will hold my judgement on your greatness until I’ve had more time to think about your deeds, but I am impressed. Tell me how you found it. Please.”

Harry bit his lip and looked towards the fire, “Only because you’re my friend and I trust you. . . I found someone’s journal that detailed where the entrance had been rehidden a few centuries ago.”

“. . . Where did you find the journal?” She asked, her brow furrowed.

“That’s secret.”

Hermione scoffed and glared at the fire like it had insulted her blood status, “I assume you used your pureblood connections to get the book then.”

Biting back the urge to sigh Harry answered, “I did not. You could have found the journal yourself if you had tried. If you had asked the right questions.”

Her head snapped around, “. . . It was in Hogwarts?”

Merlin, she was quick on the uptake, “Yes.”

“. . . Did you steal a library book?”

“No!” He answered quickly, he did not need Madam Pince after him for a crime he did not actually commit.

This time.

Hermione let out a huff and gave him a critical look, “Harry, please be safe. Where you’re going. . . I won’t be able to follow and help you. Right now, everyone in Britain knows who you are,” she took his hand and squeezed it, “Be careful.”

Lily wasn’t sure why Albus had requested she meet him in his office in the middle of the day. A mousy Hufflepuff first year had knocked on the potions class door where she had been helping a few third years. It was clear that Albus wouldn’t have asked her to come if it wasn’t urgent, and she was forced to cancel the tutoring session and make her way to his office.
It was disconcerting seeing the dour house heads in attendance as well. Judging by their quizzical expressions, the other professors did not know why they had been summoned either. They were already sitting. Apparently, she was the last to arrive.

Albus gave her a small smile that didn’t quite reach his eyes, “Thank you for coming. I have a small but urgent matter I feel needs to be discussed.” He gestured for her to sit and continued once she did, “As I’m sure you all noticed the Prophet was not delivered this morning due to a delay with the printing process. If it had shown up on time I doubt the morning classes would have happened at all given the nature of the article.”

McGonagall and Flitwick both sat a little straighter, Sprout and Sinistra looked concerned with Albus’ statement and Lily wondered why she was the only non-head of house teacher present. She did have her suspicions though, “Please tell me this doesn’t have something to do with Harry or Lord Slytherin.”

Albus pursed his lips, “I do wish I could say that this was only about the sample chocolate frog card Lord Slytherin received. If I didn’t already have my own I might be envious.”

Lily swore.

Harry being within Lord Slytherin’s sphere of influence had increased her stress levels monumentally in the last few months but now it was reaching the peaks of Everest.

“What happened?” Sinistra asked, kindly ignoring Lily’s small string of profanities. Dumbledore pulled out a copy of the Prophet and laid it on the table for them all to see. There was a picture of Lord Slytherin and Rita Skeeter speaking in his manor home.

Lily wanted to curse again. It was so easy to see why Harry had fallen for the man with his intense eyes, handsome smile and the subtle hints of his immense magical power. She couldn’t blame Harry for being entranced by him. . . but she wished that it had been anyone else.

Flitwick leaned forward, “I didn’t have a chance to read Miss Granger’s copy but there didn’t seem to be anything scandalous; merely an interview with Lord Slytherin.”

Dumbledore steepled his fingers, “Hermione Granger had a copy?”

“It might have been Potter’s. . . But it was Granger I confiscated a copy from during first period, but it was Harry who took it back when he was leaving the classroom. I thought it may have been hers when she chased after him.”

“Albus,” said Lily as calmly as possible, “What is going on?”

Dumbledore opened the paper to a set of photos, “A friend of mine at the Prophet was kind enough to send me an advance copy due to the nature of this article. . . Lord Slytherin revealed to the world that Harry Potter discovered the location and knows how to enter the Chamber of Secrets. These photographs were provided as proof.”

The news was greeted with a round of gasps; Lily’s breath had caught in her throat and Minerva’s hands had flown to her chest in surprise.

Lily looked at the pictures in disbelief; Harry was in every one of them, a teasing, cocksure smile on his face. They were framed so he was only in part of the photo and the rest were the various backgrounds. Under each image was a small description of each location according to Lord Slytherin.
Harry was in so much trouble. Lily just didn’t know if it was from her or from the rest of the world. Probably both.

James was going to have a kitten.

“I thought it was a myth.” Pomona said, her eyes distant as she considered what this could mean for the school.

Flitwick turned the paper to the front page and started reading the article, “Myths can have a basis in reality . . . I wonder if he will share the location. It’s surely under the school,” Flitwick flipped back to page five to stare at the pictures some more, “No windows and it looks like a cave system. How exciting!”

“Harry found this a while ago,” Lily muttered, “This was before his last haircut,” she sat back in the chair and stared into the air, “What else is he keeping secret?”

“An interesting question, but at the moment we must think about Harry’s safety. There will be many inquiring minds and some may not be polite with their questions, I do not doubt the veracity of these claims but many will. Maybe it would be best for his mail to through you or James first. No need for howlers to disrupt breakfast,” Dumbledore stroked his beard, “There’s also the question of the fabled creature within the Chamber.”

“Should we inquire about the Chamber with him? Do we have the right?” Flitwick asked.

“We certainly do!” Minerva exclaimed hotly, “If there is a dangerous creature within the castle that can harm the students we should be allowed to deal with it or to, at the very least, assess the threat.”

Sinistra tapped her finger absently on the arm of her chair, “I doubt the creature still lives. It has been over a thousand years. I doubt even Salazar himself has a creature that could survive that long. There have been no attacks that have been attributed the Slytherin or his creature. It was likely an idle threat he made as he left.”

The heavy feeling in the pit of Lily’s stomach grew heavier as the seconds passed. So many things had been changing and so quickly. Just a few months ago Lord Slytherin was a curiosity. Some random claimant for the throne, and now he was courting her son and had a serious chance at becoming king.

“I’ll talk to Harry. I’ll ask him about the chamber and the creature. . .” If anyone had a chance of getting an honest answer from Harry it was her.

A sense of dread remained.

Harry and Hermione entered the Great hall during the middle of lunch and made their way to their own tables on the opposite sides of the room. Most of the students were talking amongst themselves. The Prophet laying in various spots on the tables. The photographs of him winking cheerfully at him.

“—not true. Clearly fake--”

“—potion? It’s the only explanation—“

“—he’s so handsome. Slytherin is so lucky—“
Harry almost turned around to scope out who said the last little bit. Someone thought he was handsome! He bounced along to an open spot at the Slytherin table. His spirits lifted a bit higher as he sat down and Draco levelled him with a slightly shell-shocked expression and held up the paper and pointed at the picture. He didn’t say a word but Harry could read the silent plea for confirmation in his eyes.

He released a deep, gratifying sigh and nodded affirmation. A feeling of happy weightlessness filled him. This was intensely satisfying. He wasn’t even out of Hogwarts and he would be in the history books as the discoverer of the Chamber of Secrets. Tom couldn’t hold that distinction but he had let Harry. Tom was going to be the first king in centuries. He didn’t need any more accolades.

A light slap to the arm drew him from his musings. Blaise was smirking brightly at him, his handsome face lit up with pride for his housemate, “Excellent job. If Lord Slytherin agrees to allow tours of the Chamber, I get to be in the first group.”

Harry smirked, “Of course,” He glanced around the rest of the table and Draco was still staring with his mouth open, Theo was chewing his lip, Vincent and Greg were still reading the article.

Theo was likely trying to figure out what to do; apologize to Harry, or pretend that there had never been a fight. Whatever he chose Harry would maintain some space from him. They had never been close before and probably would never be. If something ever happened between him and Tom; the Nott’s would likely jump on the opportunity to take advantage of it.

“If we don’t win the house cup this year by a thousand points I say we burn down the school,” Pansy had come up behind him, “Consider me impressed.”

“I think it’s worth at least two thousand points,” Harry replied glibly. Impressing Pansy was not at the top of his list of things to do but it was satisfying. Some of his Slytherin’s would doubt him, but wouldn’t say anything until it was debunked or confirmed.

He dug into his lunch, hoping to get at least three bites before someone talked to him.

It was not to be.

“Potter!” Someone shouted from across the room, Harry turned to see Susan Bones standing up on the bench looking at him, “Is this true?” She was holding up the paper.

The entire school had turned to look at him, most of them had failed to notice his arrival and were now staring. The great hall was silent except for a low susurrous of whispering. Even the teachers that were present were looking at him.

Harry stood up and smoothed down his robes before nodding, “Yes. It’s true. . . I am dating Lord Slytherin. He is very fortunate to have me.”

There was an audible groan from the school and Blaise slapped his leg. Why was he in a hitting phase at this age instead of three or four? This was not the age to be smacking your roommates unless it was planned ahead and consensual.

“That is not what I meant,” Susan had put her hands on her hips, “The Chamber?”

He smiled, “Yes, it’s true. Please hold your applause.”

There was an explosion of sound as everyone began talking, and a few other students started yelling questions at him; Ernie Macmillan accused him of lying, Ron Weasley demanded to know where it was, Anthony Goldstein asked about the creature. The teachers in attendance called for calm but
were ignored.

Harry raised a hand slowly and the eventually the students quieted down, waiting for answers.

None came.

He sat down and ate his lunch.

The roar of voices raised into a fever pitch, and some students had risen from their seats and were approaching him and the other Slytherins. Draco, Blaise, Vince, Greg, and even Theo drew their wands, ready to hex if anyone got too aggressive.

A loud bang resounded through the hall as Dumbledore strode into the room, his lavender robes swooshing majestically, “Everyone please return to your seats and finish up. Classes start in twenty minutes!” He tucked away his wand and continued up to the staff table.

It was, maybe, a bit of relief as the encroaching students returned to their seats and his dormmates stowed their wands away.

Invisibility cloaks were going to be in season this spring and he was going to be the trendsetter.

“Your mum wants you,” Vince muttered and pointed to the entrance. His mother was standing at the doorway, gesturing for him to come with her.

Harry sighed and grabbed his bag. From the Hermione inquisition to the Lily Potter inquisition. . .

Chapter End Notes

Had a stupid case of writers block for this one, but I have a good chunk of the next one written. Yay!
Chapter 13

The conversation with his mother played through his head again as Harry climbed into bed, tucking himself into the green and silver duvet to fight off the chill. He had told her some of what he had told Hermione. He didn’t tell her where it was, or how he had found it. He had been very tightlipped about the entire subject in general.

Harry suspected that she may have been asking for someone else’s benefit, not exclusively, her own given the fact that she had pressed a few subjects more firmly than others with her inquiries. Normally, she knew when to stop pressing for answers but this time she had been more insistent. She had been particularly suspicious about was when he claimed to know nothing about Slytherin’s monster. He really did have no clue but she had refused to believe him initially.

Whatever had he done in the past to make her be suspicious of him like this?

Actually, never mind that.

There had been many questions and as many warnings; she didn’t want him to get hurt; his father would want to know more; his mail would be going through office for a bit to make sure he couldn’t be cursed or get howlers; was Lord Slytherin prepared to get yelled at for announcing this in the Daily Prophet with no warning to them?

There had been a brief argument about his mail being diverted, but his mother had been very firm about it and she wasn’t going to budge. Harry knew that stubbornness, he had inherited it from her after all. . .

It had also take several declarations that the only person who could decide if others could go into the Chamber was Lord Slytherin, and Harry would say nothing more on the matter.

Harry would have to send a message to him about if people were to go into the chamber. Any evidence of Tom Riddle would have to be extracted. . . There was the one text book and a few documents that could tie Lord Slytherin to who he used to be.

Those could not be allowed to fall into anyone’s hands.

Harry half-heartedly wondered if Tom preferred him as a lover or as someone who covered his tracks. . .

He turned over onto his stomach and tried to push everything from his mind; the silent stares of questioning students during classes; the not so silent students that openly doubted him; the teachers watching him; his roommates asking as many questions as Hermione and his mother combined. One disgustingly uncouth student had even asked Harry how good he was at sucking dick. The day had been tedious and he had not expected some of the reactions he had gotten. Especially not that last one. . .

Harry gave great head but he wasn’t about to tell some impertinent 4th year that. One of his little classmates had to drag the rude little fucker up to the infirmary since his tongue had been accidentally vanished when he fell up some stairs after being so rude.
Sleep didn’t come easily, he tossed and turned and vowed to learn occlumency for the hundredth time. It took several hours until he managed to fall asleep but it did happen.

Eventually . . .

Harry Potter dreamt of a familiar room, but he didn’t know where he had seen it before. . .

It was a square room with dark-wood paneling, and a solitary, cherry wood door. It was ten feet by ten feet and, if he wanted to, he could pace it quickly. It was completely empty except for a painting with a gold frame that faced the door.

Harry didn’t look at the painting.

He didn’t want to. It oozed and writhed, constantly changing out of his direct line of sight. Tearing and maiming with a sickening, low hum emanating from it. It set his teeth on edge. He could feel it sliding under his skin, clawing under his fingernails and biting into the bone, digging into his soul. Sliding into him with hooks and devouring his marrow. There was too much red. It set his teeth on edge and bored into his mind. Fingertips on the surface of his mind. His stomach rolled and bile climbed up his throat. He didn’t want to look but he felt compelled to look at this monstrosity that created a visceral hatred within.

If evil had a portrait, it was this.

He grabbed the frame to rip it from the wall, to smash and destroy this evil vile thing, but it didn’t move, it didn’t budge. His hands were wet. Wet with blood and viscera. The blood from the painting was travelling down his arms, turning black as it approached closer and closer.

He screamed and it slid into his mouth, down his throat. It was a cold that burned and clawed and ripping him apart inside. Claws pressed against the inside of his skin, shredding him open. Taking over him and setting into his bones, fire in his veins, breaking through his skin, spilling blood and bile and acid and inky blackness across the floor. It was devouring him from the inside out.

He was going to die.

As the blackness took his eyes and he began to fall into the abyss, a hand grabbed his wrists and pulled him free of the painting, whipping him around, “Harry Potter,” said a masculine voice.

The pain faded. A hollow sickly feeling remained behind, like he had had the wind knocked out of him and every cell in his body that had been cut into pieces and reattached hastily. It wasn’t a sharp pain anymore but he hurt everywhere. It was an ache that started at the very core of his being. Something had been inside him and it had torn him apart.

Harry let out a small sob and buried his face in the other person’s chest. Hot tears running down his cheeks and even they hurt. His skin overly sensitive to the touch. The only real relief was the silky smooth black robes that he had buried his face into.

The man who had saved him hadn’t moved when Harry had grabbed him. Even after several minutes of him crying, the man remained as still as a statue, holding Harry’s wrists pressed between them.

Finally, he looked up with a small hiccup. Holding him was Tom . . . not his Tom, the older Tom from the painting he had seen during the New Years event. Red eyes, salt and pepper hair, and just a few wrinkles on his handsome face.

Those red eyes pinned him down and scrutinized him completely. He felt naked under that gaze.
Panic was still travelling through his veins and he couldn’t stop from shaking slightly.

He released Harry’s blood covered hands. It was thick and opaque with black clots branching out like hideous roots digging down into his skin. Bile rose in the back of Harry’s throat.

Tom grabbed Harry’s chin and tilted his head up, “Don’t you dare vomit,” he pulled out a handkerchief from a pocket and started to clean the blood off while maintaining eye contact. He was rough and quick.

It was clear, this man hated him.

“Am I dreaming? This doesn’t feel like a dream. You’re the painting of Tom I met on new year’s eve,” he rambled, trying to stop his shaking hands and suppress the urge to vomit. He could taste bile threatening to come up.

The painted Tom didn’t respond for what seemed like forever, but was likely only a minute, “You are sleeping. . . but this is not a dream. I have summoned you here,’’ he released Harry’s hands. They fell limply to his sides.

Questions poured into his mind, but all were unasked. He didn’t want to know why. He didn’t want to know what that painting was. All he wanted to do was wake up. He didn’t want to be in this room with this version of Tom that had so clearly hated him. This wasn’t a safe place to be.

Harry rubbed his throat, feeling a phantom grip and looked away, to the door, to the only escape available.

“No impertinent questions? No demands? I am pleasantly surprised,” the painting mused, and grabbed Harry’s chin again, pulling his gaze from the door. This Tom was tall, like his counterpart. . . but his Tom didn’t use it against him, didn’t loom over and make him feel trapped, small.

Insignificant.

“I want to go. I don’t like it here.” Harry whispered. He felt like a child, wanting to run and hide away from the monster. His hands were stained pink.

“No. We need to discuss my counterpart and you are not leaving here until we have,’’ he was only a few inches away, a chill seemingly emanating from the painted version of Tom.

Gooseflesh sprung up on Harry’s arm, “What… what are you?” Harry stuttered out with his eyes closed. The world was spinning around him and nothing felt real. He was falling, there was no ground beneath his feet. His stomach was turning violently, “What are you!? No painting has this power! LET ME LEAVE!”

Pain blossomed on the right side of his face, a sharp slapping sound echoed in his ears and Harry was pulled out of his spiraling thoughts and he stared blankly at Tom who was massaging his hand. Harry touched where the man had struck him, it ached and throbbed violently. His nerves burned down below the surface of his skin, “. . . What do you want?”

The painting grabbed his shoulders, fingers digging into his sore flesh, “I want to know what you have done to him. . . He caters to your whims, he aids you, he shares his secrets, and he lets you keep the ones you know.’’ He looked away, a small tic in his jaw, “You have made him irrational and insane. He locked me away for daring to attack you! Me! He chose you over me!” His voice had slowly rose into a shout and he shook Harry violently, the man’s façade of humanity cracked, his face twisting into a hideous visage of rage.

His grip was so tight Harry feared that his bones would break, would shatter under this brutal assault,
“I don’t know! Let me go!” Harry cried out, he had never felt so powerless before. He weakly struggled to pull away while searching for his wand, praying it was in his pocket, even if it was a dream. There was no such luck.

The painting snarled, “You do!” He struck Harry again, the other side of his face exploding in pain.

He wanted it to be over, for it to end, to wake up free from this accursed nightmare, so he answered with the only thing he could think of, “He loves me!” Harry choked out, and collapsed to the ground out of his grip, falling on this monster of a man’s feet, “I—I think he loves me.” He had wondered if Tom truly cared for him, loved him, but if this creature, that hurt him and hated him, was how Tom truly was, was what Tom was beneath a veneer of humanity and kindness... it was the only explanation.

Tom didn’t need Harry. He had more suitable followers with a better pedigree. If it wasn’t for the menacing presence standing over him he would have felt relieved at the realization.

Tom loved him.

The older man stared blankly at Harry, his face twisted in disgust, “That is not possible.” Each word carefully, hatefully said. Like if just because he said it, that it must not be possible. By his will and his will alone.

“Well, I don’t bloody know then,” Harry snapped, his eyes blazing as he grabbed the painting’s thighs and shoved the man away, “You’re him! You should know him better than I do!” Harry climbed to his feet, “You drag me into this nightmare and attack me because you don’t know yourself well enough!? That is your problem! Not mine! The only answer that makes sense is that he loves me or is obsessed with me or something else entirely!”

The painting recovered from his stumble, and drew himself up to his full height, looking down his nose at Harry, their eyes connecting, hot rage meeting cool cruelty. The world shuddered for a second, the walls shattering and reforming within a moment. The world felt like a ruler being twanged against a desk.

And then it was normal.

The painted Tom stepped away, allowing Harry to breathe, “...I have approached this situation poorly.”

Harry rolled his eyes, “No shit. Let me out. Now.”

He didn’t respond immediately, his eyes distant, as if he was trying to solve some complex mystery, “No. I require your assistance.”

Harry was shaking, his hands balled into fists, blood roared in his ears, “You have no right! First that—that thing attacks me and then you attack me! You have no fucking right! LET ME WAKE UP!” He was going to kill him. Find his painting and throw it in a fireplace and watching it burn.

The painting frowned, ignoring Harry, “I have every right,” he said quietly, “I need to protect him,” he held his chin and began to pace around the room in a circle.

Harry watched for a minute before trying the door. It was locked and he could hear nothing from the other side. Utter silence.

“Don’t bother. It’s sealed against intrusion,” the painting muttered, walking past him. His demeanor had changed so quickly it felt like whiplash. It reminded Harry of Tom, his Tom. Why were they so
“I didn’t do anything to him.”

“I realize that now, but something is different with him. . . There was a bit of a change earlier, but not this extreme. I wonder. . . did absorbing—no. It would only account for some of it,” he muttered to himself.

Harry tried the door again, yanking on it as the painting paced, ignoring him. He pulled, he kicked, he shoulder charged, he tried kicking the handle to break it off. Nothing.

When the painting finally deigned to acknowledge him, he was completely off the floor, pulling the handle with both hands, his feet on the wall.

“It’s sealed,” he said, exasperated, “Stop.”

Harry shimmied down the wall and onto the floor, letting go of the handle, and looked at the salt and pepper haired man, “Have you finally decided to let me go?” He saw the painting on the wall behind him and turned his gaze downward. Even if he wanted to puke on the other man for revenge, it wasn’t worth looking at that.

He rolled his eyes, “I was going to let you go anyways. He wouldn’t be happy with another attempt on your life.”

Harry’s head snapped up and he was about to ask, what the hell did that mean?

But the painting continued, not granting him the time, “I want to work with you to protect him. To find out what’s happening.”

Harry looked at him through narrowed eyes, “I already protect him. I don’t need your help.” This was a blatant lie, he could use all the help he could get but this guy was too much of an ass.

His gaze was blank, staring at nothing, “You need my help, but you don’t realize it yet. . . Are you familiar with Augustus Avery?”

Harry nodded, “Vaguely. He’s a member of the Sacred 27… owns some businesses. Seems fairly low key on the scale of things.”

The painting snorted, “Low key. . . being perceived that way is how he thrives. Avery has no side except his own, every minister of magic for thirty years has been chosen, influenced by him. He’s a king maker and he arranged my counterparts rise. . . and I fear he is negatively influencing Lord Slytherin,” his red eyed gaze turned to Harry, “He is holding something that belongs to us. . . hostage. Avery could be influencing him through it.”

Influencing someone through a possession that they were not in contact with? Highly unlikely. The easiest way to influence someone would be to put a cursed possession on them. Not take something away. “How?”

“Work with me and I will tell you more.”

“I need to consider this. . . Can Tom know about this?” This seemed to be something Tom shouldn’t know but he would feel safer for posterity’s sake. That he just wouldn’t vanish one day, killed by the red eyed man staring at him.

“Absolutely not. If he’s being influenced, or monitored. . . Avery might be able to tell.”
The man was absolutely paranoid. Reminded Harry of an auror his father used to work with. Harry bit back a sigh, “You think something is wrong because he cares for me.”

“Yes. It’s abnormal.”

“Ass.”

That seemed to be the galleon that caused the goblin rebellion, making the painting snap, “You know nothing! You have only known him for a short few months. You don’t understand what we are!” He yelled, and slashed his hand through the air.

Harry shot him an unimpressed look, “What you are sounds like a whiny little bitch.” He put his hand on his hip, unintentionally mirroring his mother when she was about to lay out a verbal smackdown.

He reared back as if he had been struck, before lurching forward, an ugly sneer on his lips, “What. Did. You. Say.”

“I said that you sound like a whiny little bitch.” Harry snapped back, punctuating each word in a mocking tone, “Let me leave.”

He struck Harry again, knocking him against the wall, “You seem to have me confused with someone who can tolerate your obvious disrespect. That man you know out there, in the real world, not the dreaming... He is the carrot and I am the stick!”

He went to strike again, but Harry caught his wrist and held it tight, digging his fingers into the soft fleshy part of the wrist, “I don't care if he is the carrot and you are the dick. You have done nothing for me and will likely continue to haunt me. So why shouldn't I tell Tom when I wake up and he can toss you into some landfill?”

The painting frowned and lowered his hand, seemingly realizing that he was stuck, “He will not get rid of me. I am him and he cannot get rid of himself. You will help me because you love him and we both want him to be safe. I could keep you here forever, trapped in a hell of my own creation, I could rip you apart and devour you and do it all over again... but I won't. I need your help and so does he,” he stepped away from Harry, "Consider my... request, he needs help but he cannot know.”

Harry frowned, but acquiesced, "I will give you my answer in a week. I need time to consider things without you looming over me.”

There was a brief inclination of the painting’s head and Harry woke up with a memory of red eyes watching him.

Harry woke quietly, slowly opening his eyes to the dying embers in the brazier. He climbed from the bed. His clock reading four in the morning but it felt like he hadn't slept at all. He ached all over as he stumbled his way into the bathrooms. If only it had just been some awful nightmare where he had ended up injuring himself in a stupid way.

He didn’t brighten the room and turned on the sink faucets. Someone must have been in here a brief time ago, it was slipping under his grip. Quietly, in the dark he soaked a green towel in icy water and pressed it to his face. Just what had that all been? What did the painting mean that he was Lord Slytherin? For a painting he was very protective of his subject. Magical paintings were at most a very good imitation of their subject, they were intelligent but to actually consider yourself part of the subject? It was ridiculous. It had clearly gone mad at some point.

Gone mad and Tom had locked him away.
But how had it pulled Harry into a dream? Paintings had magic of their own but it was kept firmly within the realm of the painting. It made no sense for it to be able to pull Harry into a dream or for it to enter Harry's dream; unless, by some magic he had never heard of, it could manipulate things outside of its painted realm.

He would have to research about magical paintings and their capabilities tomorrow. And occlumency. The damn thing had gotten into his head.

Fucker.

The library would be open in an hour and he could mooch coffee off the house elves in the kitchens. There would be no sleep tonight. He was too wired from the adrenalin, sore from the attacks, angry with the painting’s actions, and frankly, he was afraid to try and fall asleep again. Harry turned on the lights to start getting ready for his day, but stopped when he realized something was very wrong.

His hands were covered in blood. Wet, sticky red blood travelling up his arms. Staining his skin, the edges of the sink, the handles, the towel... everything he had touched was marked red.

Wrapping a clean towel around his hand he pushed open the bathroom door, cleaning anything he may have touched on his way.

Quietly, to not wake his roommates, he pulled back his duvet.

It looked like someone had been murdered. Blood was soaked and partially dry in some of the spots of the bed. He hadn’t felt it at all when he had awoken...

He cast several rounds of *scourgify* on his bedding before slowly walking into the bathroom and vomiting into the toilet.

He didn’t look to see what it was that came out of him. He didn’t want to know if it was black and twisted and if it writhed. All he knew in that moment was that he didn’t want to ever find out what that other painting was.

Chapter End Notes

This was a fun one to write. Please r&r! <3
Chapter 14

Jan 6th

Snape sat at his late mother’s secretary desk, quill in hand and a blank piece of parchment spread out, completely devoid of ink. It had been thirty minutes and he had yet to pen a single word. If he could just capture one of those elusive words and pin it to the page like an entomologist would pin a butterfly to cork, but they continued to elude him, slipping between his fingers each time he thought he had one.

The letter that he had received from Dumbledore sat above his blank letter, displaying the headmaster’s loopy, elegant scroll. Lily had been able to convince the older man to interview him for the Defence position, and now, instead of replying immediately with his acquiescence, small drops of ink fell onto his reply.

It had been three days and Lord Slytherin would surely be furious with his hesitation if he discovered it. He had ordered Dumbledore’s assassination nearly a month ago and Snape had failed to get a meeting with him until now.

Dumbledore needed to die to further the cause, but it could not be the death of a martyr. An army would rally under his banner of light if he blatantly assassinated. They needed to meet, it needed to be subtle, it needed to be poison, it needed to be a quiet death with no suspicion cast on Lord Slytherin.

Dumbledore exuded a sense of grandfatherly benevolence, an insidious kindness that lured people to him, he seemed harmless and benign, but he was clever and devious. He actively working against people he considered threats behind the scenes. Buying votes and influencing people in ways that even the most cutthroat Slytherin would be impressed with.

He wouldn’t say that Albus Dumbledore was a bad person, but his morals were impeding the goals of people who strived to change the world. If only he knew Lord Slytherin’s true plans... But the venerated headmaster would not care for the deaths that were coming.

Snape dropped the quill onto the parchment and sat back. No, Albus Dumbledore, beacon of the light, would rather everyone remain alive, but in misery, than lance the boil of a corrupt society.

...Yes, some people would have to die, but in the end, it was better for everyone. You didn’t have to be a pragmatist to see it.

In Albus Dumbledore’s world it was better for a werewolf to run free, unchecked with its friends; it was better for Slytherin students to be assaulted, almost murdered, by unruly Gryffindor’s; people, with no societal standing, unable to leave dangerous situations, to be trapped in cyclical abuse; it was better for halfbloods and muggleborns to suffer under pureblood nepotism as long as everyone was alive. It didn’t matter if they were suffering.

Severus loathed the man; he loathed how he stood for what was right and yet failed to help; Albus Dumbledore may not be evil but he was ineffectual and that was almost as bad... Lord Slytherin was actively working towards bettering their society. Not through extremist activities,
but subterfuge. He was using the enemy’s own resources and greed against them.

He was pulled from his musings by a knock at his door. He closed up the letter from Dumbledore and his empty reply and peered through a small window to see Barty Crouch Jr. on the doorstep with a pandering smile on his too full lips. He cracked the door open an inch.

“What are you doing here?” He sneered, malice dripping from each word.

“Our lordship sent me. Let me in.” Crouch shuffled from foot to foot, not bothering to cast a warming charm. He was garbed in a navy-blue pinstripe suit that was completely inappropriate for the current weather.

Snape remained standing in the doorway, assessing the man before him for nearly a minute, letting the cold January air rush into his home and around Crouch, before opening the door and allowing him in.

He did not care for Crouch. The man had no true belief in a cause, he was obsessed with Lord Slytherin and would do anything he asked. He was intelligent, wily and powerful, but something about Barty Crouch set Severus’ teeth on edge.

Crouch stood inside, taking in the state of Severus’ home. It was a barren place with only the necessities, and a minor scent of potions ingredients. Someone with darker inclinations could potentially notice the slight smell of ozone, denoting artifacts of a darker nature hidden away.

“Why are you here?” Snape closed and locked the door with a loud click.

“Boomslang skin. From somewhere it can’t be traced back to me. His lordship suggested you.” Crouch responded, walking around the room, not looking at Severus.

Snape frowned and went to his ingredient cupboard and thumbed through the packages within until he located the boomslang skin and wrapped an appropriate amount up in paper. The only potion that Crouch was likely to be making with it was Polyjuice.

Behind Snape’s back Crouch silently moved to the secretary and fingered the papers, delicately spreading them open to see the contents within. He read the letter from Dumbledore agreeing to a meeting about the Defence Against the Dark Arts position opening and a request for a response confirming their meeting on January 10th. Next to it was the unfinished reply with the ink droplets staining the page.

Snape watched him from the corner of his eye before twisting around and hitting Crouch with a stinging hex to the hand to end his investigation, “My correspondence is none of your concern.” Snape hissed. His ebony wand was pointed at the dead centre of Crouch’s chest.

He raised his hands placatingly and stepped back from the desk, “No need to be so concerned Severus. Mere curiosity on my behalf. . . I had heard a rumour that you were assigned the task of eliminating Dumbledore a while ago. How could I ignore a missive penned from his venerable hand?” Crouch shook his hexed hand as if it could dissipate the pain and gave him a sly grin, “Poison can be such a troublesome method. You have to be in the person’s presence or you need someone to do it for you. Someone who will not betray you . . .” Crouch made the briefest of eye contact, but Snape’s occlumency shields were like polished obsidian.

Snape didn’t respond except with a neutral expression of vague annoyance.

Crouch walked around him, his hand brushing across Snape’s shoulders with a familiarity that he
had not earned, “Oh Severus, I know your problem already without need for legitimency,” he sighed dramatically as he came back around front and began straightening Snape’s robes, “You feel like you’re betraying your little friend that got you that interview. That you’re taking advantage of her,” He clasped his hands over his chest and pouted, “that you’ll lose her friendship.” He said in a mocking baby talk, “How sweet.”

“You dare?!” Snape hissed, he slapped Crouch’s hands away and pressed his wand into the centre of his chest.

“It’s an easy dare,” Barty stepped back and circled around to the cabinet with Snape’s potion ingredients and began perusing them, ignoring the wand pointed at him, “It’s clear to anyone with half a brain that you still care for her after these years. I suggest you avoid choosing her feelings over your orders from the dark lord. I don’t know how you intend to deal with Dumbledore but I suggest you refrain from getting caught. As long as no suspicion falls on you your little friend will remain blissfully ignorant of your nastier side,” He smirked and lightly touched Severus’ cheek.

Snape pulled away from the touch, disgust evident on his face. Lily was not Crouch’s or anyone’s concern but his. He would not abide the man talking of her in any way. It was time to pull a Harry Potter and change the subject. He shoved the packaged of boomslang skin into Crouch’s hand, “And what do you intend to do to your father?”

A cruel smile that seemed to drop the temperature in the already cold room danced across Crouch’s face, “Avada Kedrava to the chest. In the middle of Diagon Alley. It will be tragic. Some two bit criminal will panic at the sight of the approaching head of DMLE, a man who must surely know who this dastardly criminal is, pull out his wand and kill Bartemius Crouch and flee, only to kill himself immediately after! Poor sod won’t be able to stand the thought of the entire auror task force coming for him. *How tragic.*” Crouch pressed his hand to his forehead in a mocking countenance of fainting.

Snape pursed his thin lips, “An imperius would be safer than risking your own death and capture.”

“And give up the chance to be the one to rid this world of my father? *Never.* The dark lord has given me this opportunity and I shall not waste it... and I may be taking advantage of my father’s impending doom... he’s been so stressed lately that I convinced his house elf to slip him a bit of potion that will, most assuredly, decrease his stress. No side effects at all. I promise,” Crouch opened a book from Severus’ shelf and flicked through it, stopping and reading occasionally, “He’s been losing sleep and growing more paranoid. Lashing out at everyone and everything. He hexed his umbrella stand yesterday. It was hilarious.”

“And it cannot be detected or traced?” Snape asked stiffly, angrily eyeing the book Crouch was holding, “He will not become so paranoid that he won’t check his food for poisons?”

“The potion cannot be detected. He trusts Winky to a fault. How could his little slave disobey him?” he raised an eyebrow at one of the many notations scrawled in the margins of the book, “Interesting.”

Snape pursed his lips, but said nothing. What happened with the Crouch family wasn’t his concern, and frankly, he didn’t care. He was about to tell the other man to leave but Crouch spoke again.

If only it wasn’t a faux pas to *crucio* your coconspirators.

“I suggest you deal with the Dumbledore problem soon. We will be losing two titans of the light in a short period of time. And even if you do get caught, I doubt your little friend will be able to truly be mad at you when her son is also a servant of the Dark Lord.” He chided.
Snape plucked the book from Crouch’s hand and slammed it back onto the shelf, a fearsome glare emanating from his black eyes. Crouch was clearly attempting to goad a reaction from him, and annoyingly enough, it was working. “Harry Potter is not a servant of the Dark Lord. I think that is fairly obvious since I am the one that will be removing Dumbledore and not him.” Bitterness dripped from his tone.

Crouch laughed, “Oh, to be that boy. . . I am completely envious of him.”

Snape’s lip raised into a disbelieving sneer, “Envious of Potter?”

“To be with the dark lord. . . to be taken by him. . . being in his presence makes me hard,” Barty’s breathing grew heavy and slow and he began rubbing his groin, “just thinking about him. . . to experience the dark lord so intimately. . . I would give anything.”

Snape’s nose wrinkled with disgust at the sight, “Stop that at once.”

He dropped his hand but the man was clearly aroused and unashamed about it, “I’m equally jealous of the dark lord,” he approached Severus, getting uncomfortably close, brushing up against him, “I would love to be inside the Potter boy, to be inside something the dark lord has also been inside of. It would bring us so much closer. . . I would love to fuck him with the dark lord watching and then fuck his mouth, watch those beautiful eyes tear up as he goes unconscious. I would want the dark lord to join as we destroyed the boy… oh to be so close to him. . . I would give anything.” Crouch had leant in so close that they were only an inch apart, his breath hot on Snape’s face.

“You are disgusting.”

Barty smirked widely, “Ah, I forgot I was in front of Severus Snape.. the celibate snake. Never had anything for anyone except his little mudblo—“

Crouch was flung across the room with a bludgeoning curse. He fell to the ground in a crumpled heap, blood dripping from his nose. He remained still for several minutes, Snape across the room, panting heavily, his wand still pointed toward Crouch’s prone form.

Crouch stirred and began to laugh, “Maybe if the dark lord tires of the Potter boy he’ll give him to me and you can have his mother. . .” he climbed to his feet, licking the blood that was dripping down his face, “Maybe the dark lord will be so thankful for you removing Dumbledore he’ll kill James Potter. I remember how much you two hated each other. I bet you’d love that… a grieving widow you can bring into the fold,” Crouch continued, his attempt to goad Snape into reacting again, “It’ll be our little secret,” he turned with a flair, “Thanks for the boomslang skin.”

Snape grabbed the back of his suit and drug him from the house, shoving him into the street. There was the muted sound of laughter before a brief crack of disapparition.

He remained standing near the door for several minutes, rage percolating in his system, before he slowly began to slide his emotions into their compartments; separate the emotional, illogical rage and disgust from the cold, callous and pragmatic side. Crouch could not be allowed to influence his emotions. . .

Turning on his heel he returned to his desk and jotted down his reply to Dumbledore.

They would meet and he would poison the man. That would be the end of it. Albus Dumbledore would die to a particularly horrible flu-like illness. Lily would never know what crime she had unwillingly aided because he would not be caught.

He would rather die than give James Potter the satisfaction of being right.
The book stack was growing to be slightly obscene, he couldn’t see Pince or anyone at the
neighbouring table. Harry was protected by his castle walls of books, mirroring end-of-year
Hermione.

There was a disturbingly large section of books about magical paintings, but the quality was lacking.
Only three of the books really got into the details behind the autonomy of magical paintings and one
of them was contradicting the other two.

Paintings could cast magic within their own realities. A painting could not reach out and interact with
the real world outside of talking to people. They definitely could not summon people into a dream. . .
or enter people’s dreams. Did they meet in some neutral ground? How did it even reach into his
dream, into his mind when it wasn’t near him?

The third book detailed that some paintings could be enhanced with protective enchantments and
they would harm anyone who tried to hurt the painting but it was cast over the canvas and the frame,
not the reality within. The painted subject could not utilize the spells.

The painting was clearly abnormal. Tom could have created his own spells, allowing the painting to
be able to reach out and interact with others but he would have to be a genius in several fields of
magical study. Harry would readily admit Tom was smart but to know all of that?

Unlikely.

Okay, maybe he did.

Tom was over seventy years old and smart and had a lot of time to invest in research and study of a
variety areas, including binding, charms, enchantment, runes, arithmancy, and dark, maybe even,
black magic. That’s on top of the basic painting magic to imbue the painting with the personality of
the subject. He could have been working on all that during those missing years between him leaving
Hogwarts and now.

If only he could ask Tom what was going on with that painting and have him explain his work. . .
that would be amazing, but if the painted Tom found out that he had told his counterpart. . . Harry
did not want to think about the nightmares he would be subjected to. To have his roommates wake
up to him covered in blood, looking like he had just been murdered.

Maybe he would be murdered in the dreams.

Harry shuddered, of the two options he would prefer for them to find him alive but looking like he
had just been murdered. It’d be hard to explain but if Pansy could explain the three chickens under
her bed, then he could explain a ton of blood.

Somehow.

Maybe.

As it was, Blaise had walked into the bathroom just after Harry had finished cleaning up the mess he
had made in the dorm and lavatory. He hadn’t said anything outside of good morning, but Harry
knew that Blaise had seen the bruises on his shoulders and wrists from where the painting had dug
into him. At least his slaps hadn’t left a mark outside of some redness on his cheeks.

Working with the painting would be unpleasant. All he wanted from Harry was to get rid of him, and
if he didn’t agree to work with him Harry would likely be killed.
If Harry went to Tom and told him about the painting’s suspicions, what if it got free and attacked him? Would Tom choose Harry over something he had created? They had only been together for a very short amount of time. Who knows how long Tom had had the painting? He looked to be in his fifties or sixties; that’s ten to twenty years between them.

Could he compare to that?

Then again, the painting had complained that Tom had chosen Harry over it. That Tom had locked it away... for attacking him apparently. He bit back a frown. Harry had no idea when that had happened and frankly he would want some answers about that event. He didn’t remember it happening at all. Could it have been a nightmare that he had repressed? Could Tom or the painting have obliviated him?

Ugh. When had life become so complicated?

Okay, yes, he knew the answer to that; it was midsummer eve, when he had gotten just a little blood thirsty with the desire to stop Tom.

He closed the three books that had been helpful in his research regarding paintings. Well, somewhat helpful. It would be much more helpful if he could actually talk to someone with experience with the dark arts.

Tom was out of the question. Lucius was, maybe, slightly upset with him and would likely tell Tom about his questions. Regulus didn’t actively study the dark arts, and was acting a bit fishy lately. Snape would likely tell Tom and his mother. James would be very suspicious if he asked him. None of his classmates were old enough to know the more obscure magics. The painting definitely wouldn’t tell him how he was made. All the teachers were out of the question, although Dumbledore might know.

There was no one he could ask that would tell him and then wouldn’t turn around and tell Tom or someone else.

He released a frustrated sigh and pulled over one of the books he had gathered for the other subject he had decided to start researching.

Occlumency.

The painting had gone into his mind last night, had gone into and determined that Harry was not at fault for Lord Slytherin’s crazed actions. He scoffed at that. Like a 7th year Hogwarts student could manage something like that against a seventy-year-old man. That’d be like a baby managing to take out a full-grown wizard.

Harry was confident in his abilities... but Tom had so much more experience and would be able to tell if Harry was attempting to meddle with him.

There had only been one book on the subject in the entire library, and it had been in the restricted section. Occlumency wasn’t exactly illegal, but the ministry frowned upon the practice.

Legilimency on the other hand was completely illegal, considered a dark art and practitioners, if discovered, could face a year in Azkaban. It was intrusive and, if done incorrectly, could damage a person’s mind. That didn’t account for the theft of secrets, implanting ideas, or manipulating a someone’s personality.

Therefore, the situation of occlumency was that if no one was practicing or learning legilimency,
since it was illegal, then there was no need to learn occlumency. What the ministry had failed to remember was that criminals don’t obey the law. It's what makes a criminal a criminal. Legilimens probably loved all the unguarded minds, suddenly available to them.

It was stupid, ass-backwards, typical ministry thinking.

He flipped open the book and looked at the table of contents. History of the practice, breathing exercises, clearing your mind, creating mental labyrinths and traps, and even reversing and fending off a leglimency attack. This would do fine for self study. . . Harry went to the back of the book for the library sign out card. Most had faded with age except the last four.

Helmut Bones – 1823
Valencia Fawley – 1888
Tom Riddle – 1944
Barty Crouch - 1977

He wanted to laugh at the fact that Tom had signed out this very book, but his interest was mainly drawn to the last name.

Crouch would probably answer any questions he had about magical paintings. . .

Chapter End Notes

ah barty... what a card
Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

The lovely AngelofMysteries has become my beta! Hopefully the comma abuse will decrease. (No Promise)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

And here we meet at a brief interlude.
A Sirius discussion.
A meeting of the minds.
Feels of betrayal and lust. Poisoned words and cocoa.
Together our hero and and his man of mystery will meet a sticky fate.
Also, James had a bad day and it gets worse.

Friday, January 10th

Sirius leaned back into the couch, his arm snaked around the pouting and morose James Potter, and gave him a brief one-armed hug and before gently rubbing circles into his back.

James grunted and remained hunched forward, elbows on his knees, staring at the smoldering fire that gave an occasional half-hearted flicker. He wasn’t sure why he had called Sirius over, just that he didn’t want to be alone after a series of stressful work days.

Today had been the real kick to the bollocks. It wasn’t the accidental kick of a toddler, where you ended up on your side for a few minutes with little sobs wracking your body. It was the kick of a man who worked hard all week, went out with the lads and got wasted while watching football. When his glass gets knocked over you see the insane rage beast within, all that pent-up anger and aggression he had brewing underneath a veneer of apathy suddenly bursting forth to let you know what it was unacceptable that you knocked over his beer. The steel-toe capped kick that you received from this demon of a man was one that sent you to the healers with a set of ruptured testicles.

That was what today had been for James Potter.

After a week of whispers and insinuations within the auror office, Crouch had ordered him up to the main DMLE office and grilled him for almost an hour about Lord Slytherin and Harry; he had been accused of aiding an imposter to the throne, to undermining the democratic process that has taken centuries to get just this far. There had been many other mad declarations he would have been able to brush off, but Crouch had made one allegation that caused him to turn on heel and walk out of the office and the Ministry.

The thread that finally caused the carpet to unravel was Crouch claiming that James and Lily had sent Harry to seduce Lord Slytherin for the sake of bloody nepotism! That the Potter family wanted more influence, that they wanted the ear of the king, that Lord Slytherin would give them a seat on conclave, that Lord bloody Slytherin was using the Potters to infiltrate the anti-monarchists. The side that everyone thought the Potters were on, but it should have been clear the moment that Harry went into Slytherin that they were going dark.

The absolute nerve of the man! For daring to accuse his family, his son, of wanting anything like
that from Slytherin. It was 

James had managed to stop himself from punching that insipid mustache off Crouch’s face by leaving the room. By storming through the auror offices, to the lift and out of the atrium. He had heard Crouch yelling for him to come back but the blood had been pounding in his ears, the urge to defend his son, to deny all of those damn lies.

His career as an auror was over. He leaned into Sirius, resting most of his weight on him absentmindedly.

There wasn’t single time he had spoken to Lord Slytherin outside of the Lansdowne Yule ball, and he hadn’t been in a right state at the time. The panic of Harry going off with Bellatrix Lestrange and then the shock of seeing Harry kissing Slytherin had addled his brain.

Had he even spoken to Slytherin that night? Lily had. . .

It was hard to tell if he had even recovered from these repeated shocks with Harry over the last few months. One after another after another. . . Was it just this past year or had had he never recovered from Harry being put in Slytherin?

That one had hit him hard. It had made him wonder if he knew Harry or if he had been projecting his own personality traits onto his son. That’s where he had made the mistake of stepping back and assessing his relationship with Harry; instead of congratulating his son on his sorting he had said nothing. There had been letters exchanged about what was going on at Hogwarts and in the auror offices, but he hadn’t said a single word about Slytherin, and for months Harry had been in those dungeons, festering away with hurt because he thought that James didn’t love him anymore.

That Christmas had been the first in a series of emotionally cold celebrations; Lily was eventually able to coax an answer out of Harry about his attitude, but the damage had been done. They had become strangers in a space of four months.

Lily had instituted that they have dinner together at least once a month, and it had worked, to an extent, but there still been a tension between them that had not been present before. He and Harry could laugh and talk and enjoy themselves but something was missing and that was his fault.

He had driven Harry away and into the arms of someone that shouldn’t be trusted. . .

“Want to talk about it champ?” Sirius asked.

“No,” James pouted.

“Want to have a drink?”

“No.”

“Want to sulk about it some more?”

“No,” James stood, “I’m going to go see Lily, and if I can, Harry.” He went to the fireplace and grabbed a bit of floo powder when Sirius put a hand on his shoulder, stopping him.

“You’re still upset. Let me buy you a drink first.”

James slowly nodded, “Just one and then I’ll go to Hogwarts and talk to Lily.”

Lord Thomas Slytherin sat alone in his dining room, a half-eaten plate of food sat before him,
forgotten. The darkness and shadows of the room mirroring his current mood. He had heard nothing from Harry in the week since the article had been published, he had expected to receive at least a letter by this point.

A week since the article and not a peep.

Tom had had a busy week himself, preventing him from contacting Harry. There had been several requests for clarification regarding the interview, but he had refused to answer them as he felt the interview was clear on the subject. So many different attempts to get him to rephrase how he was involved with Harry.

Too many unwelcome insinuations.

He gave his wine glass a little swirl, and contemplated the situation with his so-called partners. Avery, he hated to admit, had ordered him to do the interview which had angered Nott; Nott was upset that he was ruining the pureblood mystique they had built up around him.

Once he managed to get that damn cup back, Nott was the first on his list.

His inner circle had known about his relationship with Harry and it had not concerned them, well, if it did concern them they didn't show it.

Avery approved of the situation with Harry, he could use it to his advantage. The only questions and anger were from people on the lighter side of things. The ones who knew nothing about him, the ones that thought they knew him because he had a few interviews or had met them briefly for a minute.

The fans.

Merlin, he loathed them.

Tom drained his glass and put it down on the table with a clunk.

Some heartbroken young ladies and gentlemen had sent him letters detailing their sadness, a few had even included rather risque photos, but it had been clear that Lord Slytherin had not been seeking a paramour since he had come into the public eye.

It was just by luck that he had fallen in with Harry. He titillated, teased, and tormented him. Harry was attractive and had a sense of humour, which was a pretty rare combination. Harry knew of his early life, where he had come from, who he was descended from, and he didn’t care. He didn’t care that Tom was from an impure line of insanity and inbreeding.

Once Harry had known of his true intentions, he had decided to take his side. He had decided that it was worth the risk if they could right the wrongs of Wizarding Britain.

Also, Harry was fun to be with. And a good kisser. And good at. . . other things.

With a sigh, Tom left the dining room and climbed the stairs, grabbing an outdoor cloak along the way as he headed to the owlery. He had an intense desire to know what was happening with Harry.

Tom honestly had expected to be contacted by him, but then again, Harry would be preparing for his NEWTs and they were likely already burdened with homework. It had been just as bad when he was in school, maybe worse.

Dumbledore had been a soft touch in his transfiguration classes if someone started sobbing their little,
panicked heart out. Normally some Ravenclaw that couldn't stand the pressure.

Pfft. Ravenclaws. They were almost as bad as Hufflepuffs.

He opened the door to the chilly attic room that housed his owlery and glanced at the available owls. A few days ago, the snowy white one had brought news from Severus that he had gotten the job interview. He gently stroked her head.

Tom felt around in his pocket, pulled out his watch and looked at the time. It was going to happen soon. Very soon. He basked in the knowledge that Dumbledore was going to be poisoned this night, unknowingly ingesting that poison that Severus chose, Ricin.

It would be interpreted as a bad case of the Dragon Pox. A quick case of the flu and then the beacon of light would be gone into the great unknown.

The muggle loving headmaster would be killed by a creation of those he held in such high esteem. Muggles could do no wrong in his eyes and now he would be killed by a muggle poison. How deliciously ironic.

A frown crawled its way onto his face. Muggles were a menace. The memories of explosions and undetonated bombs rose to his mind. The sound of air raid sirens, the panic to run and huddle in the underground like rats. The incessant whining and crying of children, whether from fear or hunger.

Merlin, the hunger during those months at Wool’s during the rationing had been atrocious, as had the hatred from the other children; they were envious of him. Envious that he didn’t suffer like they did during those months he was gone to Hogwarts; that he didn't have to suffer through most of the bombings, or starve with them, or freeze with them when the power went out. That he wasn't constantly pulled from his sleep by air raid sirens. That he wouldn't be damned to serve in the army after a certain age, or work in a factory or beg. That he was all the way up in the safety of Scotland because his dead mother had somehow left him with a scholarship to a prestigious school they had never heard of.

Tom lowered his hand from the owl and frowned. Merope... There were too many conflicting feelings regarding her. Merope had given him the gift of magic, something he loved more than anything else in the world, but she had died, leaving him alone to struggle.

He grasped the locket that hung from his neck and held it tightly. She had sold his heritage for a pittance. The proof of his lineage left to some old woman who collected it as a trinket, to flaunt her wealth with visitors, to lord it over them and watch their expressions. Anyone who knew that Smith had once owned the locket was dead and gone...

Now, with years of experience behind him, he knew that it was better that he had suffered; that she had died and left him with the name Riddle.

Being a Gaunt would have been much worse than a mudblood. To be of the family removed from the Sacred 28 for being insane, destitute and incestuous... Yes, it had been better to be a Riddle than a Gaunt.

And now he stood in his father’s home, looking across a field towards the filthy hovel his mother had lived in.

Would she have raised him in that dereliction? If Morfin and Marvolo had been dead? Would his father’s parents have raised him if they had known that he existed? If Tom Riddle Sr. hadn’t fled his rapist?
He didn't blame the man anymore. After many years, that rage had dissipated, but earlier in his life he had been so angry that his father had abandoned her.

Had abandoned him.

That night when he had killed his father and grandparents, he had been seething with rage, seeing them in this mansion with all their wealth, while he had suffered down in London. It wasn’t fair. It hadn’t been right. He had felt entitled to their possessions, to their lives. Even after snatching the truth from his father’s mind about Merope, his rage hadn’t cooled, and they had paid the price for it.

His life could have been so different if she had just continued to dose his father until the pregnancy had ended, but no, she had a bloody moral dilemma.

Tom cursed loudly, causing the owls to jump and flap around the room briefly.

She grew a conscience, damming him to live in a miserable orphanage instead of up here, in York. In a mansion his father’s family owned, in a town his family owned. Who in their right mind controls someone for months at a time and then decides to release them, thinking nothing bad will happen?

Tom Riddle Sr. had been a horrible person in his own right, but he had not deserved what had happened to him. Maybe if he had known that it was the only way to carry on the Riddle line he may have taken Tom in, or if he hadn't his grandparents might have. . .

Alas, he could not prove what could have been, he could only theorize what his life may have been like, and that was it.

He was here, and this was now.

And here and now, he was trying to decide if he should send Harry a letter. Would it be a command not to reveal the location of the Chamber of Secrets? A nice "how-do-you-do"? A present of some sort?

No.

He had nothing to give him.

He thought of the unopened present Harry had given him for his birthday. There had been a few moments when he had been tempted to open it. Slowly rotating the small box between his fingers hearing the contents within gently tap against the sides. It was likely some trinket of negligible value, something Harry had found wandering down Diagon Alley, but while it was within the box it somehow held an entire universe within; it was a shard of the Philosophers Stone, one of Morgana's jewels, a lost letter from Salazar Slytherin regarding a different, better hidden Chamber of Secrets.

Tom snorted at the thought, the Chamber of Secrets secreter chamber. He had honestly thought there would be more. . . Secrets when he had first found it.

The setting sun washed the attic with orange and pink light. To the northwest just a bit away was Hogwarts. . . and Harry.

He turned on his heel and apparated.

It was Friday night. The end of the first week back at Hogwarts after the holidays.
The other Slytherins were having a small celebration regarding making it through the first week. It wouldn't be long before they were burdened with too much homework to even lift their heads from their notes, much less have a little party.

Harry was not among them. He was currently hunched over and hurrying through a tunnel, his invisibility cloak in pocket and wand in hand, lighting the way.

It had felt like almost an hour that he had been heading down it, towards Honeydukes.

Late Wednesday, he had sent a letter to Barty Crouch Jr. asking him if they could speak regarding a subject that he was researching.

The painting.

It had only been three hours before he had received a reply from a very haggard owl. Harry had expected a reply within a day or two, especially since he had sent the letter close to midnight. He had not expected the man to be so eager to speak with him but they had hit it off nicely at the party.

Harry ignored the intrusive thought that mentioned Crouch was on a mission to kill his father.

Barty Crouch had agreed to meet and suggested the Hog's Head on Friday around four in the afternoon. Harry had feigned illness and opted out of the festivities and dinner. Thankfully his last class on Friday was at two, so he had plenty of time to make his way into Hogsmeade.

Folded up in his pocket was a list of questions he had put together to ask the other man, he had seemed knowledgeable in a variety of subjects, particularly dark subjects, and Harry knew for a fact that he had researched legilimency and occlumency, not that he would let the man enter his mind. That was too personal. He couldn't think of anyone he would willingly allow into his mind.

Maybe Tom. . .

Caught up in his thoughts, he didn't realize he was at his destination. Harry tripped on a step and crashed forward into a set of stairs that ended with a trapdoor at the top. His shins burned and his hands had small cuts on them from where he had stopped himself from smashing his face into the hard stone.

He looked at the small injuries and vowed to clean out the wounds later, as dirt was all over his hands. He pulled out his invisibility cloak and hastily wrapped it around himself, listening for sounds of anyone nearby.

It was completely silent.

He pushed the trapdoor up and quickly climbed out from the tunnel, before gently placing it back onto the ground. It was practically invisible; it blended well with the floor and dust surrounding it.

The amount of the amount of dust on the Honeydukes cellar was making him reconsider buying from them in the future; how hard was it to clean a room of dust? They had magic for Morgana's sake. . .

He quietly ascended the stairs from the cellar and slid out the partially open door behind the counter where the owner was sweeping. Dust fell into the cracks therefore, the basement.

Ew. Ew ew ew.

A quick silencing charm on the door and the bell above it and he was out of Honeydukes, walking
through the frigid winter air towards the Hog’s Head.

The lamps hadn’t come on yet, but the path was illuminated by the barely visible setting sun. He ducked into an alley briefly and took off his invisibility cloak; it was only for sneaking out of Honeydukes after all. Leaving Hogwarts grounds was common for those students that were seventeen or older, so anyone who saw him out and about would just think he climbed the gates.

Harry exited the alley and carved a path through the snow to the pub. The town was silent except for the wind and one, brief crack of apparition somewhere behind him.

He looked at the sign over the pub and with a heavy sigh, pushed open the door and looked around for the blond-haired man he was to meet.

Crouch wasn’t there yet.

Harry made his way back, ignoring a few of the looks he got from the regulars and a brief nod from the barkeep. He wondered when people would forget the article. Yes, okay it wasn't everyday someone found the Chamber of Secrets, but still-- it had been a week! Most people had forgotten about Celestina Warbeck’s accidental flashing incident within two days of it being in the Prophet!

Well, he clearly remembered it but most people had forgotten.

Maybe.

Potentially.

Who knew? It wasn't like he was Celestina Warbeck. Maybe people looked at her all the time and went, "Hey, remember that time you accidentally flashed half the Ministry because the top of your dress wasn't strong enough for your ample cleavage?"

Harry sat down at a table in the back, and requested a bottle of wine and two glasses. The bartender barely looked at him when he delivered them. With a grin, Harry poured himself a glass and started his evening. Even if he couldn’t be celebrating with the Slytherins he could get a light buzz.

He raised his glass in a silent cheer to his first week back, and the beginning of the final part to his last year at Hogwarts.

Chapter End Notes

More coming soon
Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

AN: Consider this my early birthday present to you guys. Also, the next chapter may be slightly delayed because of my involvement in the Tomarry Big Bang on Tumblr, but hopefully I'll be able to get that out of the way and get back to Chapter 17.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 16

Tom had apparated into the central road of Hogsmeade, thinking to look at purchasing some treat or trinket for Harry before sneaking into the castle, even though his presence was the greatest gift he could offer. He would have decided which way to enter the castle while in the shop; either through the Forbidden Forest, or the passage behind the mirror on the fourth floor.

He had been going to decide on the way there, but those plans were quickly abandoned.

Why sneak into the school when Harry was walking away from the castle, oblivious to Tom's presence?

Why had Harry snuck out of Hogwarts? It clearly wasn't to see him.

Tom pulled up the hood of his cloak and cast a set of concealment and notice-me-not charms to refrain from drawing attention to himself as he followed behind at a reasonable distance.

Harry made his way down to the Hog's Head and entered. By the time Tom had entered he was already sitting and ordering a bottle of wine.

*For two.*

He watched as Harry slowly began to drink one glass, and then another, waiting for whomever was to join him.

The boy could put away alcohol like he had been doing it for years. He might need a new liver in a bit.

Tom would never call the Hog's Head a romantic place for a secret rendezvous, no one would, it smelled horrible and the swill was, well, swill. Could some reporter have convinced Harry to meet them? He didn't want to consider the idea that Harry would be seeking attention from someone else. The thought was ridiculous. Harry had him, Lord Slytherin, as his... something. He didn't know what to call what they were.

Not yet.

Harry meant something to him. Something important, but also something unknowable, unnamable.

He was close to getting up and joining Harry when the door opened in a flurry of fluffy snowflakes, letting in a tall hooded man who immediately spotted Harry and walked towards him. Tom frowned heavily at this, but when the man lowered his hood his hackles raised.
This was unexpected, and frankly, unwelcome. Why was his... paramour meeting in secret with a member of his inner circle? Were they colluding against him? Tom sat within earshot, ready for them to reveal treachery.

They greeted each other cordially and Crouch sat down, Harry pouring him a glass of wine, "Thank you for coming all the way out here to speak to me."

Crouch smiled, "How could I refuse to aid in your research endeavors? Now, tell me about this painting."

Tom felt the briefest moment of relief when Crouch said that he was helping with research. but the mention of a painting sent a bolt of panic through his chest.

He watched from the corner of his eye as Harry pulled out a small sheet of parchment, hastily scrawled notes written on it. "I also wanted to ask you about occlumency, but I think it should wait. . ." Harry blushed slightly and looked at his notes, "So—"

"Why me?" Crouch cut Harry off and inched closer in his seat, "Why not ask Lord Slytherin these questions?"

Harry frowned and looked away, his eyes glancing over Tom's incognito form briefly. "I didn't want to bother him. . . I imagine he has lots of things to do. Conclave is coming up, and I imagine there is some behind the scenes things occurring," Harry cocked his head to the side. "Is it safe to ask you these questions? Can I trust you?"

"You can trust me to be loyal to Lord Slytherin."

"Good," Harry said, as if Crouch's loyalty to Tom meant that Crouch was also loyal to Harry. "I need to know if there is some sort of magic that can give the subject of a painting its own agency, that it is able to cast spells, such as somnium immeo."

Tom sighed heavily and leant back against the wall, his head thumping against the rough plaster. He hadn't thought Harry would remember the attack before the Wizengamot.

When they had met in the hallway Harry seemed to have no recollection of the dream when he had dipped into his mind. Harry had not noticed the faint bruises on his neck either.

It was completely clear why he had sought out Crouch instead of him if he remembered. If he remembered the attack and that it had been his counterpart behind it.

Crouch raised an eyebrow, "You're telling me you couldn't find a book about this at Hogwarts?"

"They only have light books regarding this subject. I was thinking maybe you knew something in the, ah, darker areas." Harry said in a loud whisper.

Had he even thought to cast an anti-eavesdropping charm? Merlin, he needed to talk to him about his drinking.

"It certainly seems familiar, but what do I get for telling you?" Barty asked, openly leering at Harry in a way that made Tom feel vaguely uncomfortable. He was aware of Crouch's. . . latent feelings for him, and they were easily dismissed, but seeing him eye Harry in such an open, hungry way. . .

Harry's jaw clenched, a small tick at the corner, "I would owe you a favour. You know what kind of
weight that carries."

Crouch smirked, "I do."

Harry had felt uneasy since Crouch had sat down. They had hit it off at Tom's party, but they had been surrounded by other people, including Tom, a man that should not be trifled with.

He also wasn't sure if he wanted to owe Crouch a favour, they were on equal footing when it came to money and Crouch was higher up since his father was a member of the Sacred 27, and whatever favour he would call in would likely be troublesome.

He had been in the debt of others in the past, and he loathed the feeling of it, but the painting . . . he needed to know.

Harry held out his hand to shake on it, when a robed stranger nearby stood up and slapped Harry's hand out of the air, and stood at the side of their table, his wand barely visible at the tips of his fingers, ready to duel.

Harry leaned back against the wall and felt around in his pocket for his wand.

Crouch had drawn his wand, "I don't think this is any of your business, friend." He said friend the way someone at the front of an alley you accidentally went down called you friend while holding a knife in their hand, and asking for your wallet.

"Actually, I believe it is," the man lowered his hood and Harry felt bile rise up in his throat at the sight of Tom, his red eyes narrowed. "Put your wand away and leave now. We will discuss this later," he commanded. "Harry and I need to have a discussion."

Crouch had gone white. "Of course, My Lord. My apologies," he bowed and fled the establishment, knocking a chair down on his way out.

The other patrons of the bar watched the event unfold, but returned to their drinks when Tom shot them an angry look.

Harry grasped the table, his head spinning. How had Tom known? Was he watching his mail? Was he watching Crouch's mail? "Tom?" he asked in a strangled gasp. His stomach turned violently. He should have had food before drinking half a bottle. . .

"Not now," Tom snapped and approached the bartender, purchased a room for the evening, and took Harry's arm, practically dragging him up the stairs. Harry stumbled a few times on his ascent, unable to find his balance.

He hadn't done anything bad, but he felt nervous, like he was following a prefect up to a teacher's office to get disciplined. Although, Tom had been a prefect. He had likely dragged students around to offices for punishments in the past.

Harry smiled, Tom had been Head Boy . . . such an esteemed set of positions and now he was working to take over Britain. If he could go back in time and tell the professors of that era that Tom Riddle, Head Boy, was in line to become King . . . well, they would probably cart him off to the Janus Thickey ward.

Tom entered the third room on the landing and sneered at the state of disrepair. "Absolutely filthy. . ."
"he muttered before casting scourgify several times, cleaning up the modest sized room. The room was on the smallish size, with a thin bed pressed up against a wall, and a table with two chairs up against the opposing wall.

Harry slowly walked into the room and thought about laying on the bed, given his slightly inebriated state, but it seemed to be stuffed with something that was not the norm.

Was that hay sticking out of the side?!

He opted to sit at the table and watched Tom, clean the room a bit more and cast a series of anti-eavesdropping spells.

Would Tom attempt to use Legilimency on him? He must have heard that Harry knew about the painting. He focused on his hands, looking at the small cuts on his hands from when he had fallen. He had never bothered to clean them.

"How did you know?" he asked quietly.

"Know what?" Tom responded, turning back to him and stowing his wand away.

"That I was meeting with Crouch."

"I didn't. . . I was concerned that you hadn't contacted me this week and was coming up to meet you at the school when you walked past me," Tom answered and sat across from him, "I am now more concerned that you were meeting with Crouch behind my back."

Harry reared back as if struck, "I wasn't meeting him behi—"

Tom pressed his fingers to Harry's lips, "Stop. I know why and it's my fault."

Harry sat back against the chair at a loss for words. He knew?

Tom interlaced his fingers together on his lap and stared out the window, at the lightly falling snow. "What happened on the night of the second was unacceptable. You clearly put together that it was the painting at my home that attacked you," he huffed, his breath blowing a strand of hair upwards. "I had him commissioned a few decades ago; when I did, I arranged for the artist to not cast the regular enchantments to prevent him from having more. . . intellect, which is the norm, and the law."

"Why?"

"I didn't need some dumb painting that acts as a shallow image of me. I abhor the false intelligence of the paintings that grace most of the walls in the isles. After, I took him home and infused him with magic. Made it so he could interact with the world outside of the frame," his brow furrowed, "I think he may resent me for doing so. Trapping him. . ."

Harry chewed his lip. "Why did you have him commissioned? You don't seem to be into portraits."

His expression was distant. "This plan to take the throne has been in motion for a long time. When I had it commissioned it was with the knowledge that my appearance, and potentially, my mind would be undergoing a change. I wanted to retain a piece of myself, one that would be able to aid me, to make sure my logic was sound," Tom chewed his bottom lip. "He thinks that my attraction to you is illogical, that I am not of sound mind for being involved with you. And because of that, he tried to kill you the night before the Wizengamot. I thought you didn't remember so I didn't say anything. I wrapped the portrait in somnus paper and have put him away for now. Hopefully, he will come around."
They sat in silence, Harry absorbing this information. The painting had mentioned that he had attempted to harm him in the past, and that Tom had locked him away, but really, it was just concerned and wanted to protect him. That was its purpose, and it had prevented the. . .

. other painting from killing him.

Harry looked at Tom, who was still looking out the window. "The painting means a lot to you, doesn't it?"

Tom nodded. "He's part of me. . . I will have to bring him back out at some point, but I swear I won't let him hurt you."

He didn't understand why Tom felt so strongly about a painting, but Harry knew that he had never had a family, and maybe this painting was the closest thing to one.

Harry decided to win the painting over. He refused to split Tom from something that clearly meant so much to him. He reached across the table and stroked Tom's cheek, "Thank you for telling me. I shouldn't have contacted Crouch about this. Forgive me?"

Tom gave him a thin-lipped smile. "There's nothing to forgive. I understand why you sought out someone else. . ." He reached around to the back of Harry’s head and pulled him in closer, kissing him deeply.

"Three Broomsticks?"

"Too crowded."

"The Wizard's Knob?"

"Too expensive."

"Hog's Head?"

"Acceptable." James answered, and they continued down the road, treading down a path that had been carved out before them. A path that thankfully headed straight for the Hog's Head.

They pushed open the door and drank in the scent of stale beer, hay, and a lingering aroma of goat. It honestly hadn't changed since they had been in school which was vaguely disturbing. Maybe, they shouldn't have been in the Hog's head when they were in school but it was a bit cheaper and quieter than the Three Broomsticks, and they had needed places to plot without being overheard.

They sat down at the bar and ordered a couple of shots of firewhiskey and two pints of ale.

"You know," Sirius began quietly, "This might be a good thing, if you actually lose your job."

James snorted and tossed back the shot put before him. "Oh? Tell me how that's good."

"Dumbledore is looking for a new Defence Professor. You and Lily could work together at Hogwarts starting next year. You've said that her living there and you in Godric's Hollow has made it less intimate and it's lead to stress between you."

"Yeah, that's true." James muttered, "I should have just moved into the castle with her when she got the job initially, but no I had to be stubborn."

Sirius nodded and tipped back his ale, "I remember, that was around when Peter died."
He said to move into Hogwarts with her. That way I'd get to be more involved with Harry while he was at Hogwarts. . . but no. I thought it would be better if Harry went to school like I did. Like we did."

"With limited parental contact?"

"Exactly."

They sat in silence, thinking about the trouble they had gotten into at Hogwarts, the time they almost burned down the greenhouses coming to mind.

The bartender stopped in front of them, smearing a glass with grease, "If you're looking for the Defence position I would interview fast. Someone is upstairs for the interview now."

James and Sirius exchanged a look, "Here? Why here?" They asked in unison.

The bartender shrugged, "Boss set it up with Dumbledore before he went on vacation. I didn't ask."

Snape and Dumbledore sat across from each other, the small table the only thing that separated them, they stared at the other appraisingly, they had exchanged some brief pleasantries but had remained in a silent staring contest for the last few minutes. Waiting for the other to attempt some slip of legilimency, while they both reinforced their occlumency barriers.

It was difficult to determine if the rippling in the air between them was from the intensity of their gaze or the mugs of steaming cocoa that Dumbledore had ordered before Severus had arrived. He may have also been glaring a bit harder due to the fact they were meeting in the Hog's Head instead of the Headmaster's Office within Hogwarts.

The nerve.

Dumbledore likely suspected that Lord Slytherin was behind Severus seeking out this position, he would be a fool not to think so, for Slytherin to have someone within Hogwarts able to recruit the best and brightest to their cause. As long as Dumbledore thought that instead of suspecting poison in his future.

The ricin capsule remained accessible in Severus' sleeve, ready to strike at any opportunity of Dumbledore turning away.

"I must confess that I did not expect you to become accomplished in so many fields after Hogwarts; two masteries in Potions and the study and combat of the dark arts; as well as two partial masteries in Arithmancy and Runes. You have pushed yourself much farther than I had expected."

"I strive," Snape responded bluntly and contemplated drinking the cocoa. Would the man attempt to use veritaserum on him? No, he had seen it poured into the cups.

"That you do," Dumbledore sat back, putting Snape's resume on the table between them, and gave Snape a probing glance. "We both know that you are not suited for working with children, you don't have the temperament. I remember that clearly from your Hogwarts years. Lord Slytherin sent you?"

They both knew that it was the case, and Snape refused to act in a farce. "He did."

Dumbledore frowned, looking at Severus from over his half-mooned spectacles, "I know that we failed you at Hogwarts. You didn't have an easy time socially, you were harassed, it was unfair what happened during those years. We truly did fail you, but now. . . I worry for your soul."
Snape narrowed his eyes at him, nostrils flaring. Just what was the old goat getting at?

Dumbledore took a long sip of his cocoa before beginning to speak, each word carefully chosen. "We are aware Lord Slytherin represents blood purity and the upper class. The part of society that can and will throw money at a problem until it goes away. You do not come from that life, even with the influence of Slytherin you will always be a second-class citizen. Always under someone's thumb."

If looks could kill, Dumbledore would have been a greasy smear on the wall.

"Severus, I believe you should work with us. With me. I want your help to stop Lord Slytherin and his pureblood . . . friends. It is clear what the likes of Nott and Flint would do to muggleborns and halfbloods. I want your help to stop Lord Slytherin and his hypocrisy." Dumbledore finished, but Severus didn't buy any of it. No matter how carefully Dumbledore spoke, it was clear he didn't believe that Severus would switch sides, that his heart wasn't in it and that this was a rehearsed piece for Snape.

He closed his eyes, shoved his anger in a box, and shoved that box into the far corner of his mind. When he opened them, there was nothing but a cool calmness behind them, "You failed me. The teachers of Hogwarts failed me. I was sent here by a man whom I respect; he has never sided with my attacker. If someone from our side almost got me killed for a joke they would be punished, and I would not be sworn to secrecy.

"If you truly wished to bring me to your side, I suggest that you preach something that isn't tripe regarding the welfare of muggleborns and halfbloods. My time at Hogwarts taught me to protect myself and those I am loyal to."

Dumbledore took off his glasses and pinched the bridge of his nose, "I know," he said sadly. "We failed to help you and you have your right to resent us," he put his glasses back on and stared at a dent in the wall, his voice becoming soft. "I had hoped when Lord Slytherin and young Harry grew close that it would soften some of Slytherin's sharper edges but it has not been the case. That the boy's brightness would illuminate some of the dark. . ." he locked gazes with Snape, "I fear for Harry Potter and I fear for all the halfbloods that will help Slytherin take his crown and be cast down once he ascends the throne."

Snape frowned. Had he not just told him that he only looked out for himself? Dumbledore's attempt to guilt trip was a failure, "I do not know enough about their relationship to comment."

"Severus, I know many of Lord Slytherin's secrets; I know where he comes from, who his family is, and with a few simple actions I could stop him and his campaign."

"Why haven't you?"

Dumbledore sighed, "I don't want to hurt him. I don't want to hurt anyone. Like you he has had a difficult life and deserves a chance, but to go this route. . . this route of hypocrisy and destroying others? It is not the right way."

"Would you prefer him doing so through extremist measures? To attack the ministry and Wizengamot? Elect himself as the leader of magical Britain?" Snape drawled. "You say that you want to stop him and his pureblood friends from subjugating muggleborns and halfbloods, but what have you done to stop the rise of pureblood supremacy? You beat Grindelwald decades ago, you could have been minister and used that power in the Wizengamot. Everyone was eating out of the palm of your hand, you could have done great things, but no, you went back to Hogwarts and society suffered for it. And now that someone has come to change things from your preferred status
quo, now you have opinions and work to change it. You speak of Lord Slytherin's hypocrisy but have you looked in a mirror?" His fingernails dug into the arms of the chair leaving scars in their wake. That box he had shoved away had popped open like a jack in the box, his rage exploding forth.

Dumbledore was silent for a long time, easily several minutes before admitting. "You're right," the old man walked to the window and looked out at the lightly falling snow. "I was complacent and then... I grew old, but now I have a chance to help and I want your help-"

Snape didn't pay attention to watch Dumbledore was saying. He was too focused on breaking open the poison and sprinkling it into his drink.

"-give you the defence position if you work for me as a spy. A double agent." Dumbledore turned just after Snape had returned to his former sitting position, "take that offer to your master. I imagine he would like to have a spy within Hogwarts."

Snape stared blankly down at the desk for a minute, his mind racing, "You will give me the job but only if I work against Lord Slytherin?" He would risk Snape recruiting children just to get an in with Slytherin?

"Let him know what I want. A double agent that has both masters in the know, so to speak. I imagine Lily will be happy to have her childhood friend working at the school with her. She must be fond of you to ask me to interview you."

Would people eternally use his friendship with Lily as leverage? The only one who hadn't was Lord Slytherin.

"Can I have the job offer in writing?" Snape asked.

"It depends on what your master decides."

Harry sat on Tom's lap, a smirk on his face, all talk of murder and paintings was pushed to the side; right now, in this moment, he wanted to enjoy being with Tom. He wanted to bask in him, his little power flare ups, his scent and his taste. This was an opportunity luck had presented him and he refused to decline it.

The table and Harry's chair had been knocked over when Harry had climbed on top of Tom, and began kissing him. Small butterfly kisses all over his face and neck.

Tom's red eyes seared into him, devouring him. To be desired and wanted like this by someone like Tom, someone so powerful, so experienced, it was an ego boost to be certain.

There was barely an inch of space between them as Tom grasped Harry's arse, squeezing it tightly, before bucking upwards. He kissed him then; it was rough and frantic, filled with a need. A primal desire.

Harry's erection strained against his pants and he could feel Tom's rubbing up against him, and it only seemed to make him harder as he pulled open Tom's robes, his fingers spreading across the older man's chest and slowly making their way further down, his hands dipping into Tom's pants.

Tom broke away from the kiss and attacked Harry's neck with a series of bites, that would eventually bruise. "Harry, I want you," he growled.

As if that wasn't obvious.
"Good. I want you too." Harry grunted, it was too hot in here. He had taken off his robes, but he was still way too clothed. He extracted his hands and pulled off his jumper and undershirt. *Much better.*

Tom wasted no time, latching onto Harry's nipple, licking and nibbling on it, while grinding up against him the entire time.

Harry held onto Tom's shoulder's tightly. "*Fuck me. Fuck me now,*" he commanded, and with a brief moment of vertigo and a loud thud they were on the ground. Harry's head was mercifully saved by his discarded clothing.

"As you wish," Tom whispered and began to undo Harry's belt, pausing to rub Harry's erection through his pants, his fingers firmly pressing against his slacks as he stroked him. He released a shaky breath, "you don't realize how beautiful you look. You truly don't. The way you're lying here. . . flushed and wanting. It tests my control."

Harry shuddered at the sheer desire in Tom's eyes. He didn't doubt that it tested his control. He didn't doubt it at all.

Tom leaned forward, and with shaky hands finished undoing Harry's belt and worked on his fly, pulling Harry's pants and underclothes down to his thighs, revealing his erection to the air.

Harry barely had a moment to feel embarrassed by his position before Tom had lowered himself down and engulfed his cock. All he could see was the top of Tom's head bobbing up and down on his shaft, his hands at the base, gripping it tightly. Harry tangled his fingers into Tom's hair, gripping it loosely as the older man continued his ministrations.

Tom swirled his tongue around the tip of his cock, licking up the small trace of precum that had formed, before dropping his head down and taking in the entirety of Harry's shaft down his throat. He raised his head, taking a small breath and began to move his head up and down, sucking hard on his cock.

Harry could have came from that but Tom's firm grip on the base and a small tug of his balls were warning enough.

With a big gasp of air Tom threw his head back, sucking in lungfuls of air, while beginning to stroke Harry's saliva coated prick, "*Merlin, yessss,*" Tom continued but it was in what Harry could only assume was parseltongue. It was hot.

Tom began to slowly finger him, gently spreading him open, thrusting his fingers in and out, preparing him for his girth. He added another saliva slicked finger and pressed up against his prostate. Harry arched his back at Tom's ministrations, the wooden floor was uncomfortable but he didn't care, this is what he needed more than anything else right now. He needed Tom. "*What are you saying?*" he moaned as Tom squeezed him.

"*How much I want to fuck you,*" Tom leaned forward, his head hovering over Harry's face. "*How much I want to make you beg to orgasm, how much I want to be inside you and cum inside of you. How much I want to have you at all times.*"

Harry grabbed Tom's collar and pulled him down into a deep kiss, before rolling them over so he was straddling Tom once again. His arse pressed against Tom's clothed erection, "*Good.*" He slid down to his thighs and undid Tom's pants, releasing his prick.

He lowered down and took Tom into his mouth, slowly making his way down to the base, bobbing
his head as he lathered Tom's shaft with saliva. He didn't take him as deeply into his throat as Tom
had with him; he still had a gag reflex after all.

Tom's long fingers slid into his hair, gently combing through it before gripping tightly and thrusting
up hard. Harry took the roughness in stride, sucking hard and letting Tom control the slightly brutal
pace for nearly a minute, before he pushed off of Tom's thighs and lifted his head, breathing deep.
"That wasn't very nice." He reprimanded and licked his lips slowly, giving Tom a sultry look.

"I'm not a nice person," Tom growled, grabbing the back of Harry's head and pulling him forward
into a deep kiss, licking his lips. "I want to be inside of you," he hissed, his voice rough with desire.

Harry grabbed Tom's wrists and pinned them to floor on each side of his head, before sliding
forward, his arse hovering right over Tom's prick. "As you wish," he replied in a breathy tone and
began to press down onto him, his cock stretching and filling him perfectly.

He remained completely still for a moment, adjusting to the girth. His eyes fluttered closed as he
slowly lifted himself and slid back down on Tom. "Merlin, yes." He repeatedly whispered it like a
mantra as he impaled himself on Tom's cock.

He pulled his hands free from Harry's grip and began to stroke his weeping erection, before thrusting
up into him, Tom's red eyes drinking in every expression that crossed Harry's face.

Harry's expression and the way he was riding him was completely lewd and he loved it. This is
exactly what he had needed.

James and Sirius both looked up at the ceiling when it sounded like something had fallen
over, again.

"Whoever that is they're certainly going at it." James mused and took another drink. He wasn't quite
wasted but he and Sirius were getting there.

"Probably some Hogwarts students sneaking out to go at it. It's nearly impossible to get intimate in
the castle," said Sirius.

The bartender frowned, "I'm not too certain that it's fun times up there."

James and Sirius exchanged a dark look, "What do you mean?"

"Bloke came in and interrupted these other two. Seemed sort of angry, told one to take a flight, and
he rented a room and dragged the other upstairs," He looked at James and then pulled out a
newspaper, that rotten accursed newspaper that had caused so many problems, and flipped to the
center spread. "Yeah, these two that went upstairs." He tapped the cover then the insert, "Lord
Slytherin and Harry Potter in that room."

There was another thump and they both bolted off their chairs.

Harry was close, so close.

Tom's was buried inside of him, his fingers firmly wrapped around Harry's prick, pumping in rhythm
with every thrust.
"Oh god, Tom. Oh god." He fell forward, his hands on each side of Tom's head as he grew closer to his orgasm. The lower half of his body moving in a fast rhythm as he bounced relentlessly on Tom's cock.

Tom was biting his bottom lip and moaning as Harry increased his pace, his cock hitting in just the right spot.

"Oh, Merlin yes!" Harry clawed into the wooden floor, leaving indents as he came, hot jets of semen hitting both of them as Tom pumped his cock furiously, emptying him of all his seed.

Tom continued thrusting into Harry as he grew limp. The younger man's head flopped forward, his breathing hard as Tom continued to fuck him; he grabbed Harry by the throat, holding his body up.

He looked divine.

With a hearty groan he started to come inside of him, thrusting upwards, harder and deeper than before. He was so deep, so deep. Tom continued to pump until he knew he was completely drained, and his head fell back with a thunk against the wood floor as he relaxed.

Tom released Harry's neck and he fell forward, resting bonelessly against him. "I think. . ." he panted, "I needed that."

"Agreed." Tom replied, and wrapped his arms around him, holding their sweat slicked bodies together.

In this moment they were both content, at peace with the world. . .

There was a loud crash against the door and they both turned their heads towards it.

Tom summoned his wand to his hand with an impressive display of wandless magic and pointed it at the door, ready to curse whomever would dare interrupt them.

There was another bang and the door swung open, hitting the wall with a thump. Harry only had a second to realize who was on the other side before Tom hit them with a wide range stunner.

Sirius and James fell back against the wall in a small heap, their forms unmoving on the ground.

"Oh, my goodness," came a voice from further down the hall. A voice that both Tom and Harry recognized. "What has happened here?"

They scrambled to cover themselves before Albus Dumbledore made it to their room.

A wand appeared first, and then it was followed by the venerated headmaster, his twinkling blue eyes were very glittery when he took in the sight of Tom and Harry's state of dishevelment. "I must say this is not what I expected at all."

Another face peered into the room. Snape looked at them and then to the floor where Sirius and James were slowly coming to, "I am forced to agree," Snape said, "My Lord." He bowed to Tom and walked out of sight.

Harry coughed, and sidled forward, closing the door on Dumbledore, his father and godfather and
looked to Tom, his eyes wide with shock, "What. The. Hell?! Why are they all here?!"

Tom looked just as perplexed. "I am thoroughly bewildered," he replied in an even tone, "I thought Dumbledore would be interviewing Severus up at the school, not down here."

Musing about why Dumbledore, Snape, James and Sirius were all present at the Hog's Head could wait for a different time; with a look of mutual agreeance, they began to dress.

Voices in the hall grew louder. Harry would be mortified about what his father had just witnessed but at the moment he was too confused to care.

Once properly clothed, Harry opened the door and glanced at the group, all whom were standing and staring at one another. "Dad, Sirius? Why are you here?"

James gave him a shocked look, "I could ask you the same! You're not supposed to sneak out of the school!"

Dumbledore nodded, "I must agree with James. For being truant you will have to serve detention, and I have to take 50 points from Slytherin." His blue eyes landed on Tom, giving him a speculative look. "Lord Slytherin, one would hope that you would not encourage Hogwarts students to sneak off grounds for liaisons."

"One would," Tom replied with a sneer and walked out, past the assembled group, while dragging Harry behind him.

"Where are you taking him?!!" James and Sirius shouted in unison.

Tom stopped at the top of the stairs and looked back, "I am returning him to the school. Isn't that what you desired?"

"How about we all walk back up to Hogwarts together?" Dumbledore said genially.

Harry cursed under his breath.

The group of them, minus Snape who had not been heading to the school, walked through the snowy streets of Hogsmeade. Dumbledore in the lead, Tom and Harry in middle, and James and Sirius in the far back. Ten feet of space were separating each group.

Harry cast a set of anti-eavesdropping spells around the two of them, "Hermione wants to meet you."

"Your muggleborn friend?"

Harry nodded. "I want to convince her that you aren't evil and she wants to meet you during the next Hogsmeade weekend. She's been very insistent about it. She may have also figured out the chamber can be opened with parseltongue. She doesn't know where it is though."

They walked in silence for a minute as Tom contemplated the situation. "When is the Hogsmeade weekend?"

"Near the end of February, beginning of March. I'll owl you the date." Harry replied, grateful that Tom was not upset about Hermione knowing how to open the chamber.

"Tell her that we will meet, but only because you asked," Tom sighed, his breath visible in the cold air, "I don't know how much time she and I will have to speak."
Harry nodded again, focusing on the path before them. "You'll be busy with all that being king stuff."

Tom chuckled, "Yes, that stuff. May I ask, how did you end up becoming friends with her? You're a halfblood in Slytherin and she's a muggleborn Gryffindor. Opposite ends of the social spectrum so to speak." He sounded genuinely curious.

He chewed on his top lip before speaking, "I was a bit of a social pariah at the beginning. My mum was the potions professor, my dad an auror, from a light family and all that. . . I didn't know anyone except what my father had told me about their families. Those first few months were horrible. I didn't know my place, I had no role, and I did decent in class which meant people would talk to me at dinner but the cliques had formed before I'd even entered the school."

Tom nodded and watched Harry's expression as he recounted this part of his life. He was familiar with the stress of entering Slytherin as an outsider.

"Gryffindor and Slytherin share a few classes and Hermione and I started getting paired up. I found out that she was a social outcast within Gryffindor."

"Oh?"

"She can be a bossy, and she's a know it all. She's more suited for Ravenclaw with learning but she has strong morals." Harry chuckled. "You could tell back then that she thought herself above everyone else because she had memorized the text books."

"And you became friends?"

"We did. It was a case of being stuck together for group projects, but she loosened up eventually and we both managed to integrate in our houses better by the time Christmas rolled around first year." Harry ran his fingers through his hair, dislodging some snowflakes, "We actually met on the train on the way to Hogwarts. She was so excited to be a witch, to have magic, it was clear that she loved it, and people mocked her for it. For being gifted."

"I know how it feels." Tom replied softly.

There was a cough from ahead of them, Dumbledore had arrived at the Hogwarts gates, "This is where Lord Slytherin stops. Harry, why don't you walk up to the school with your father and Sirius?"

Harry frowned, looked at Sirius and James, and with a resigned sigh, nodded to Dumbledore. "I guess this is goodbye for now," he said softly, before wrapping his arms around Tom's neck and pulling him in for a kiss.

It wasn't rough like their earlier ones, it was soft and gentle. Their bodies pressed up against each other, melting the snow as they had a mini snog session in front of a small crowd.

Harry broke away, smiling, "It was good running into you tonight. I think you saved me from some trouble."

"I did." Tom replied and gave him a quick peck on the lips and squeezed his ass. All in full view of everyone else, "Behave."

Harry nodded and walked through the open gates, James and Sirius trailed behind, shooting dark looks at Tom, before heading up to the castle.
Dumbledore and Tom watched in silence until the trio made it up to the castle. Once the doors closed, Dumbledore turned to Tom, "This attempt for the throne remains foolhardy. I won't allow it."

"The decision is not up to you." Tom replied, not looking at him, "The Sacred 27 will decide. Although, I know you already purchased Burke's vote. Such an underhanded thing to do."

Dumbledore sighed, "I will do what I have to protect this democracy we've built Tom. Purebloods should not be allowed to control our society."

Tom looked to him, red eyes meeting blue. "Goodbye Albus," he said and disapparated.

*And thus ends our interlude.*

Chapter End Notes

AN: AND THEN SNAPE STOOD UP AND SCREAMED, “RAE IS MEAN.” AND PUNCHED HIMSELF IN THE FACE.
aka thank you again Rae for being my lovely beta even though you drag my comma loving ass through the flames of hell.
Also. . . AHHHH SO MANY WORDS <3
Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

Previously on Battlestar Galactica . . .
Gaius Baltar and Number 6-- wait.. this isn't BSG?

Previously on What We Are . . .
A curious meeting at the Hogsheade. Harry and Barty get busted by Tom.
Tom then busts his nut with Harry. Snape gets a job offer and Sirius and James get an eyeful. Harry decides to work with the Painting.
Was poison administered? Will James be able to forget what he saw? Will Harry get slapped around by a jerk?

See this and more right now! One your computer! Or tablet! Or phone! Or paper if you print things out to read (I ain't judging. You do you)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 17

January 10th

Harry glanced back towards the gates, where Tom and Dumbledore stood glaring at one another. Well, Tom was glaring. Harry wasn’t sure what Dumbledore was doing, probably giving Tom a good-natured smile and soft warnings about the dangers of a monarchy. He turned away and continued heading towards the castle with his father and Sirius on each side of him like a set of guards. Lame guards.

James was blowing the snow out of their way with his wand and looking anywhere but at Harry. Sirius, on the other hand, had a lopsided sort of smirk on his handsome face.

“What?” Harry asked with a put-upon tone. He could feel the stirrings of a headache forming behind his eyes.

“How are you? Glad to see you’re not walking with a limp,” Sirius giggled, it was a manly-ish giggle but a giggle nonetheless, and bumped into Harry lightly. “Merlin, I can’t even imagine how you’re feeling right now. If my mum ever walked in on me with a bird I think I would have just died.” Sirius chuckled and gave him a friendly slap on the back.

Harry did not understand the sense of camaraderie that his godfather seemed to feel. He glanced at his father, James’ cheeks were red from more than the wind-chill and he looked away from the two of them, his gaze focused on the ground in front of them. “I’m not embarrassed or ashamed about what I was doing.” Harry replied.

His father’s head whipped around, “What? How?!” James asked in disbelief.

Harry sneered in his best Draco impression “I’m not the one who burst into a locked room for no apparent reason. If anyone should be embarrassed it’s the two of you.”
“No apparent reason, my ass. Just sounded like he was beating you.” James muttered angrily and pulled the doors open.

Sirius nodded, a concerned look in his dark eyes, his cheerful composure gone. “Honestly Harry, we thought someone was being hurt, and the bartender did say that you had been dragged up there. We weren’t taking any chances.”

Harry groaned and whipped off his glasses, wiping them clean, before shoving them back onto his nose. “Did you even think to break the eavesdropping spell and check? Morgana’s tits, I can’t believe you two!” Harry pushed past them and vanished into the dungeons.

James groaned and resisted the urge to hit his head against the door in frustration before he and Sirius made their way through the dark corridors and to Lily’s quarters. They slunk into the room with the password and he fell heavily on the couch.

Lily hadn’t looked up at them as they entered, she remained at her desk flipping through essays, “What brings you here tonight, boys? Need some help with your potions work? Is your prefect being mean and you need me to talk to them?” She finally set the papers down and looked at her husband and his Sirius.

James slumped forward and sighed heavily, “Lily... I need to be obliviated.”

“No.”

“You don’t even know why.”

“Don’t care. It’s not happening.”

“He was balls deep in our son. That is forever burned into my mind.” James pleaded.

Lily froze completely, her eyes wide and James felt the softest brush across his mind. Bloody Snape. Bloody Snape and his bloody mind magic. Soon he’d have to worry about Harry knowing it too if he was going to be in the man’s presence.

Lily pursed her lips and sat back, “I’m not obliviating you.”

Sirius looked at James, “Moony will do it if we explain that happened.” He received a scathing glare from Lily for that.

“Remus won’t if I tell him not to. I don’t want to risk you two ending up with more brain damage then you already have.”

“Balls deep.” James whimpered, ignoring the dig, and buried his face in his hands. Today was a long day that kept getting longer. Crouch, Harry, and now, Lily. His one bastion of comfort wouldn’t even tamper with his brain.

She frowned heavily, looking a bit more like her sister than she would ever admit, especially that little pucker in the middle of her forehead, not that anyone would ever tell her that. “That’s what you get for bursting into a private room.”

“I thought he was assaulting our son!” James exclaimed, and jumped to his feet, angrily pacing. He wouldn’t have done it if he had known what they were actually doing.

“I just remembered an appointment.” Sirius muttered and vanished into the floo, he did not need to
hear them fight. If they started to have a row they could get loud enough to wake up the entire castle, including the squid.

“Did you actually stop to listen or did you burst in there without thinking?” Lily asked, rubbing her eyes.

James stopped his pacing and glanced at her. “That is not the point.”

She looked up at him, her green eyes alight with mischief. “Next time listen to see if it’s good crying or bad crying. That can make a world of difference. Your parents certainly knew the difference.” Her lips perked up into a lopsided smile.

James chuckled, “I was concerned. What if he had been hurting him? Using the Cruciatius or some other horrible curse?”

“Then you would have heard screaming instead of thumping.” Lily chuckled and turned back to the essays.

“Slytherin put several anti-eavesdropping spells on the room.” James retorted and spun on his heel, pacing again.

“And?” Lily dipped her quill in the inkwell and wrote See Me at the top, “You and Sirius are both capable of dismantling those.”

“That’s not the point!” James exclaimed, stomping his foot like a petulant child.

Lily sighed and pulled another paper off the pile, this was not how she wanted to be spending her night, “And what, pray tell, is the point?” Her voice was cool enough that it seemed to drop the room temperature several degrees.

“Lily, he snuck off grounds to have... sex with Slytherin. That’s unacceptable. We can’t allow that kind of behavior!”

“We snuck off grounds to have sex!” Lily slammed her quill down on her desk and glared up at James.

“Neither of us use dark magic!”

“For Merlin’s sake!” Lily shouted, stood up and circled around her desk, jabbing a finger into James’ chest, “Why are you so suspicious of everything Harry does? He’s our son! Not some criminal for you to interrogate and question his motives!”

James grew still, and then collapsed on the couch in a slump, not saying anything for several long minutes, “You’re right. You’re absolutely right.” His voice cracked.

Lily sat down next to him and wrapped an arm around him, “James, I know Harry’s involvement with Lord Slytherin upsets you. It upsets me too.” She ran her fingers through his hair, slowly flattening his messy hair.

James looked up in surprised, “It does? I thought you liked him.”

Lily nodded, “I do think there might be a bit more to him than we know and I want to give him a chance.”

“Why?”
“Because Harry cares for him.” She answered softly.

James grumbled, “Harry is not always the best judge of character. Look at who his friends are. Look at how much he drinks when he thinks we won’t notice.” He mumbled.

“You would prefer him to go seven years alienating his roommates? I know we don’t see the best side of his roommates but maybe he does. Harry isn’t a bad kid. He’s our son and I trust him. Please give him a chance.” Lily pleaded.

He shook his head minutely, “Fine,” it was time for a subject change, “I may have lost my job.”

“What?!” Lily’s eyes widened comically.

James grabbed the back of his head and groaned, “That’s why we were at the Hog’s Head. . . Crouch reamed me out about Harry and my supposed connection to Riddle and how I’m undermining our society with helping an imposter to the throne.” It sounded so ridiculous. It was ridiculous.

“And you quit?” She asked softly.

“I walked out.”

“You may not have lost your job. . . but Crouch has certainly lost his sense.” Lily shook her head.

“Agreed,” James looked over to her, a small smile on his face, “Do you think Dumbledore would want to hire me as the Defence professor?”

Lily smiled, the two of them at Hogwarts was a pleasing idea to say the least. “Maybe. He’s likely still up. Head to his office and ask. Password is Puffy Pucks.”

“I don’t even want to know what Puffy Pucks are.”

“Imagine a puck that if you eat it slow is like a marshmallow and if you eat it fast will break your teeth.”

“I said I didn’t want to know.”

“I heard what you said. Go.” She commanded and practically pushed him out the door.

He only got slightly turned around once. James would swear that that staircase did not used to move in an anticlockwise pattern. He gave the gargoyle a quickly muttered, “Puffy Pucks,” and knocked on Dumbledore’s door. The light was still on at least.

“Come in James,” The door opened and he walked in. Dumbledore was seated behind his desk, “I didn’t expect to see you again tonight, not that your presence is unwelcome.” He said cheerfully.

“I didn’t expect to be seeing you again either,” James sat down in a chair across from him “I heard you were looking for a Defence professor for next year. I know this is short notice, but would I be able to apply?”

Dumbledore peered at him from over the top of his glasses and frowned slightly, “Alas, I have offered the job to Severus.”

James didn’t know what to think for a moment, before finally saying, “You cannot be serious.”

Dumbledore rested his right hand on top of his left, “I am. Had I known, I would have gladly
interviewed you. Has something happened at the auror office?” He asked kindly.

James grimaced, "Yes. I don't wish to go into it." He wrung his hands together, it wasn't like he had to worry about money or anything like that. Their house was paid off and they had savings from their jobs and from his parents. He could be unemployed for years before it made a real dent in their accounts, but the thought of not being able to go out and do something productive would drive him insane within a few months. If he didn't have a job he'd be out with Sirius most days and bothering Remus on the other days.

"I can only imagine what is happening at the auror office. We live in chaotic times. Tensions are high and people are afraid of Lord Slytherin and what he has the potential to do. The auror office has always been a highly-strung workplace and what Lord Slytherin promises could change so many aspects of our world, many people are afraid of that. I am sure that once the Conclave adjourns in February, things will return back to normal."

James cocked his head to the side, just what did Dumbledore know? "You don't believe he will win?"

Dumbledore leant forward, his fingers steepled together and smiled benignly at him, "I believe that the majority of the Sacred 27 to see that risking their power is not worth bringing in an unknown entity."

Just how many pies did Dumbledore have his fingers in? It was clear why Snape was hired now. Espionage. "If you think he's not going to win, why have you hired Snape?"

"For a worst-case scenario."

"You mean if Slytherin wins. . . Albus, why in Merlin’s name, would you think that Snape would help you? He's been obsessed with Dark Arts since we were in school. Lord Slytherin is everything that appeals to him and his ilk." James pinched the bridge of his nose. He couldn’t comprehend what was going through Dumbledore’s head. He couldn’t comprehend what was going through Snape’s head. Well, he could imagine what it was and he didn’t like that at all.

"Severus is a half-blood who has been friends with Lily, a muggleborn, for many years. I think, that ultimately, he would betray Lord Slytherin to protect his first friend. I'm hoping that if he is forced to spend some time with people who are not as darkly inclined as he is, that he may see the right way."

James stared at him blankly for almost a minute, "You're hoping him being near the faculty and the supposed innocence of children will guide him to the light?" James asked, his eyebrows climbing up his forehead before he let out a bark of laughter, "I think he would end up going darker! Plotting the murder of innocent 11-year olds," James shook with laughter, "You've hired Severus bloody Snape to torment children in the hopes that he will see the right way."

Was Snape there in case Lord Slytherin failed in his bid for the regency? To tell Slytherin what Dumbledore was up to and vice versa. If Slytherin took the throne, would Snape be recalled to a different position in Slytherin’s government? Probably be given the position of head torturer. Or maybe he’d stay at Hogwarts and become the Dark Arts professor. Why learn Defence when your professor is the nastiest piece of work out there?

James paused and tapped his fingers on the arm chair, “And I'd honestly prefer you not to risk my wife around him.”

Dumbledore stroked his beard, blue eyes twinkling dangerously, "Hogwarts is the safest place in Britain, and Lily is a skilled duelist. Remember when she beat you in the dueling competition in your
seventh year?"

James frowned, feeling the need to change the subject (not that his arm, and pride, still hurt every now and then from when she had broken it during that duel). "Did he agree to be your spy?"

Dumbledore nodded. "Yes. I don't trust him to supply me with completely accurate at the moment, but I believe it may happen in time under Slytherin's orders." James was surprised by the honesty. "Although, if Lord Slytherin fails to take the throne, as he most likely will, this is a worst case scenario situation as it is, and if Severus is a poor teacher I will fire him and if you still require employment at that time, consider the job yours."

James blinked. "Oh."

"It does depend on how the next Conclave proceeds; if Lord Slytherin becomes King... I pray that we are not forced to live in a new monarchy." Dumbledore said before pulling out a handkerchief and coughing into it.

Merlin, he prayed that they would not be under a King, removing Queen Imogen from the throne was one of the best things the Sacred 27 had done for their society, probably the only thing they had done for the betterment of society. So many people were excited for a monarch but James feared for what would happen to Britain.

"It sounds selfish, but I don't want my son being some sort of royal consort. If there was a coup, and I imagine there will be, he would be one of the first people--" his words cut off suddenly as a long repressed and held back sob escaped him. He pulled his glasses off and began rubbing them on his sleeve, "I'm so afraid that Harry is going to get himself killed and I feel like there is nothing I can do about it that won't make him hate me more than he already does."

He couldn't believe he was breaking down in front of Dumbledore of all people. James had never felt so defeated and helpless before in his life, even sitting next to his parents as they passed within days of each other, he hadn't felt as useless as he did now. He wiped his cheeks and sniffed.

No words were spoken for some time, the only sounds were from the fireplace, Dumbledore's trinkets and the sleeping portraits on the walls. Albus broke the silence with a small cough, "You are in an impossible position. Harry is a good person and it may take him time to see that Lord Slytherin is in the wrong, but he will and when he does, it would be good for him to know that he has a family to return to. One that will protect him. We can only hope that he will realize sooner, rather than later."

James pushed his glasses back onto the bridge of his nose, "I wish I knew more about Slytherin, I wish I could understand him."

"Many journalists, and political strategists feel the same way," Dumbledore replied, and began braiding the end of his beard. "I feel that I may have a better understanding of him then most but even I would hesitate to say I could understand him."

James cocked his head to the side, "How do you mean? I thought you knew-- do you have a spy? An actual spy?"

Dumbledore gave James a small, impassive smile, "I knew him once. Not well, you could say he disliked me, strongly, but I feel that even with his past, that he has a chance of redemption and I sincerely hope that Harry will help guide him down that path."

James frowned. "How did you know him?" This was the first that he had ever heard of this.
Dumbledore and Slytherin had known each other? Why didn’t anyone else know about this? Why hadn’t Dumbledore told anyone? Was he trying to give Slytherin a second chance? Did he deserve a chance in the first place?

Dumbledore shook his head, "Not now, I want to give him a chance before I am forced to show my hand. I don’t want to ruin his, and maybe Harry’s, chance of a good life after all this; he would have to succeed in Conclave and proceed to be a horrible ruler before I was forced to do so. Maybe he could be a decent King, but I doubt that he will become King." Dumbledore coughed again, "I must cut this meeting short James. If you have any concerns, please seek me out. I am always willing to help,” he said kindly and patted the back of James’ hand.

January 11th

Of the things Snape found most peculiar about Lord Slytherin, of which there were many, the fact that most of the rooms in Riddle manor had muggle lights was the one that perturbed him most. They were never lit when there was a larger gathering of his followers, but today the stained-glass lamps were glowing warmly throughout the house. The lights were not bright though, ancient Edison bulbs that had been kept in repair with magic, their dim lights barely illuminated the room where they had gathered, instead long shadows were thrown around the walls, fingers of blackness scraping up against ceiling, only to be chased away by the flickering of the fireplace.

The three of them were seated in antique high back chairs in a semi-circle around the fire. Bella was on Severus’ left and closest to the fire, an empty chair reserved for Lord Slytherin to his right and next to that chair was a pensive Barty Crouch.

Crouch had been present the longest, seemingly waiting for Slytherin long before Severus and Bellatrix had arrived, and they had been waiting for Lord Slytherin for nearly an hour.

None of them dared to move or speak with the other, nor did they want to. Severus was not overly fond of Bellatrix, and given Crouch’s performance at his home the other day, the less involved he was with him the better.

The oaken double doors at the other end of the room opened silently, the only indication of someone entering through was the flaring of the fire.

Bellatrix sprung to her feet immediately and dropped into a low bow; Snape and Crouch followed suit at a slightly more sedate pace, “My Lord. I am honoured to—”

He held up a hand to stop her from continuing and sat down in the remaining chair, “It’s good that you are all here. I want updates from Severus and Crouch, but first-- Bellatrix, I have an assignment for you.”

From the corner of his eye Snape saw Crouch frown at the use of his last name. He wondered what Crouch had done to be demoted in status by Lord Slytherin.

Not that he would ask the man.

Bellatrix nodded eagerly, a small smirk on her face; she had clearly noticed the usage of his surname, “Anything you wish, my Lord.” They retook their seats, Bellatrix sat at the very edge of hers, “What is it you wish of me?”

Lord Slytherin sat back, interlacing his fingers across his lap, “Rita Skeeter.”
Bellatrix glanced up, “You want me to kill her?” she asked a bit too eagerly.

Skeeter and Bellatrix had been roommates during their Hogwarts years and Severus could only imagine how much the two disliked each other. There had been stories whispered in the dungeons for years after.

“No. I want you to find out everything you can about her; where she lives, her family, her friends, any known associates, where she gets her information, her hobbies, where she eats, all her secrets. I want everything.” He leant forward and grabbed Bellatrix’s chin, “Most importantly, you must not be caught.”

Her pupils had dilated almost completely, leaving only a thin outer ring of colour visible. “I will be completely discreet. I will know her inside and out. I swear it,” she whispered in a husky tone.

Slytherin released his grip and sat back. “Thank you, Bella,” he stated, his dismissal evident.

She bowed again. “It is my honour. . . May I enquire why you are not using Potter for this? I imagine this would be more of his area of expertise.”

Severus watched Lord Slytherin’s expression. It barely changed, except for a small pursing of the lips, “I thought you would relish the chance to prove that you are not just a. . . how did he put it? Ah, yes. *A sledgehammer.* Just because he is good at what he does, does not mean I don’t want someone else to also be capable of the same.” He turned back to Bellatrix, “I am truly remorseful that I do not have the opportunity to use your talents to their fullest degree. Someday, in the near future, they will be required. For now I hope you can cultivate some new ones,” he said softly.

Her bottom lip shook minutely. “I understand. My apologies if I have angered you.” She bowed again and left the room.

Silence descended over the three men. Snape tried not to think about how he had encountered the Dark Lord and Potter the night before, or how he had walked in on something during New Years.

Being made privy to the Dark Lord’s sexual life was not on the top of his list of things he wanted to do in his life. It was, in fact, near the bottom of the list, right above having a four-way snog with James Potter, Sirius Black, Remus Lupin, and the corpse of Peter Pettigrew.

“How did your meeting with Dumbledore go?” Lord Slytherin did not look at him, but instead into the orange flames of the fireplace, the glow flickering off his red eyes.

Snape sat a little straighter. “Exceptionally well. I was offered the job.”

Lord Slytherin glanced his way, an eyebrow raised; no one had expected that Dumbledore would offer him employment given his. . . nature. Slytherin shook his head and scoffed. “And the poison?”

“Administered. He should be dead in less than two days.” Snape paused, contemplating telling Slytherin the rest of his conversation with Dumbledore. “He was willing to hire me in order for me to act as a double agent between the two of you.” He pulled the job offer from his inner pocket and passed it to Lord Slytherin. “If you wish it I can take the post after his death, unless McGonagall decides to fight one of his last decisions.” He drawled and sat back, crossing his legs.

Slytherin took the letter and carefully opened it, as if expecting the letter to curse him. Not that a letter couldn’t do that, but Snape had seen Dumbledore pen it and the man had not cast anything upon it, “We’ll see what she does in the wake of his death. I would prefer to have you out in the general public instead of trapped away within the walls of Hogwarts, but it would be a very advantageous position,” he acknowledged.
Severus preferred being unrestrained too, not surrounded by hordes of simpering snot-nosed brats. He could easily teach Defence Against the Dark Arts, but it wasn’t like he wanted to do that with his life. Then again, he would get to work with Lily...

Snape took that thought and crushed it into a box before shoving it into the dark corners of his mind. Getting to work with Lily should not be one of his goals despite what Dumbledore had implied.

They were friends and that was all they could be. He had known that since the moment she had started dating Potter. Compared to him, Severus would always be looked over.

He was drawn from his musings by Lord Slytherin’s chuckle, “He truly wanted you to act as a double agent... What could he even offer?”

Even though it could be interpreted as a rhetorical question, Snape answered, “He attempted to appeal to my better nature as well as my friendship with Harry Potter’s mother.”

“You have a better nature?” Crouch smirked.

Lord Slytherin slowly turned his head to look at the sandy-haired man, “Think not of his better nature and pray that I have one at all.” He said menacingly before turning back to Snape who watched Barty grow pale and still.

If Severus thought he was on the Dark Lord’s short list for walking in on him and Potter, he was wrong as Crouch seemed to occupy the list entirely. He wasn’t even near the list. The list was in another room and Snape wasn’t even on it at all from that tone.

“Any ideas on why the interview was held at the Hog’s Head instead of the castle?”

Snape shook his head, “No. I thought it odd myself, but he has supposedly been holding job interviews there for several years. Apparently with good cause, as the woman he interviewed before discontinuing the divination program was... a difficult interview.”

“Intriguing. We will see how it goes from here. You may leave.” Lord Slytherin nodded his head, dismissing him.

Snape bowed and began to make his way out when he heard Lord Slytherin turn to Crouch. Then he asked, “And just why did you think it was acceptable to meet with my paramour at the Hogs Head last night?” Snape stomped on his urge to walk slower or eavesdrop on the conversation, but Oh Merlin, it was tempting.

He made it to the front door when Crouch’s screams began to permeate the house.

January 13th

It had taken Harry a long time to fall asleep. Trepidation about seeing the painting, he guessed.

He thought briefly of his conversation with Hermione in Charms. Her shock when he had told her that Lord Slytherin had agreed to meet her. Her annoyance when he revealed it would be in March instead of before Conclave. Her shock again when he revealed that he had snuck out and spoke with him, and her holier-than-thou attitude when he told her he had been caught by his father, godfather and Dumbledore in flagrante with Lord Slytherin.
He didn't tell her what they had been caught doing since he didn't need her to be imagining that. It would add a weird and uncomfortable dynamic to their friendship, like when Draco had argued with Blaise about who had the most attractive mother.

They were both beautiful women but one didn't argue the finer points about it. It just wasn't done. The dorm had been a weird and tense place for a week after they realized they were arguing who had the best décolletage.

His mind slowly drifted from Hermione to Tom as he grew sleepy. He could have told Tom about the painting the other day. He could have told him how the painting entered his dream recently. It made more sense to tell Tom about it since the painting had threatened him and he seemed to be a bit of a bastard, but the curiosity about this aspect of Tom, and his intentions... he needed to know more. He didn’t believe Tom was being influenced but maybe if he could get close to the painting it would see that he wasn’t a bad match for Tom.

At some point after midnight he closed his eyes, and when he opened them he was in the dark wood paneled room of the painting. He ignored the dark writhing canvas to his left and instead focused on the man in front of him. He hadn’t changed since he had last saw him. Hair still salt and pepper, eyes still red and slitted, gaze still hateful and malevolent.

Why had he decided to not tell Tom that he could enter his dreams? It had seemed like a good idea to befriend him, since he is Tom, but that horribly malicious look was making him second guess not telling Tom when they had met in Hogsmeade.

“Er... Hello.” Harry muttered lamely. Merlin, he was intimidating without saying a word.

“Have you made your decision?”

Harry nodded.

“And?”

“I’ll help you. I don’t think he’s being influenced but I will help you protect him. I want to work with you.” Harry said, trying not to sound too eager or helpful.

The painting snorted and rolled his eyes, probably the most emotion he’d ever displayed outside of outright anger. “Good.”

Harry bit his lip. “I ran into him the other day while researching you.”

The painting stopped and stared, a flicker of trepidation darting over his face before falling behind a cold mask of supposed indifference, “Oh?”

“I didn’t mention your suspicions, or your threats, but he did tell me about you.” Harry had begun circling him, “He said you’re a part of him and I don’t think I could hurt him like that, to the point that he would have to cut you out, not that he would, but I’d rather us get along.”

“How did you run into him?” The painting put out a hand, stopping Harry from moving.

“Coincidence,” Harry answered glibly, “He told me about you attempting to murder me before the Wizengamot and he apologized for your actions.”

“Even more evidence that he is being influenced.” He said haughtily.

Harry frowned, “Was he really like you? Before?”
Cold red eyes that did not contain any of Tom’s warmth looked at him, “We were the same being.”

“What did he do that changed that?”

The painting’s hand slashed through the air violently, “That’s none of your concern! Your concern is aiding me.”

“I have conditions.” Harry crossed his arms and jutted his chin out. He would not back down from them either.

The room was already cold but it seemed to drop in chilliness a bit more, “What?” The painting asked incredulously.

“I want you to teach me occlumency and legilimency, I need to know them if we’re to work together.”

The painting paced briefly, contemplating his request, “. . . I suppose that is agreeable.”

“I also want assurances that I will not be murdered.” Harry added quickly.

The painting frowned, heavily, “I can guarantee it won’t be by me. I can’t promise to protect you for others.”

“Fine. I want to learn about the Dark Arts as well.”

“Fine.” He gritted his teeth. “Anything else?”

“. . . Can Parseltongue be taught?” Harry asked nervously, a slight blush to his cheeks.

The painting pinched the bridge of his nose and sighed. “I will assess your capabilities. Even if you can’t speak it, some can learn to understand it.” Harry could almost see him losing the will to live, it was fascinating.

“Oh. I can say open in Parseltongue.”

A disbelieving brow rose. “Show me.”

Harry took a deep breath and hissed out what he had used to open the Chamber of Secrets.

The painting twitched and looked at him in disgust and horror. “That was atrocious and wrong and how did you fail the syntax on something as simple as open the door?”

Harry shrugged. “I learned it from a snake.”

The painting shook his head and scoffed. “I know, but for Morgana’s sake, never do that again.”

"Wow, geez, sorry. Didn't mean to offend your delicate sensibilities."

"I don't have delicate sensibilities," he snapped.

"Then don't be offended when I can only vaguely hiss something." Harry started hissing randomly.

The painting snarled and backhanded him hard enough that he slammed into the wall.

Harry held himself up against the wall in shock. His face and torso hurt from the dual impacts. He wouldn’t be surprised if he had bruises when he woke up. "Should I have to ask for an unbreakable
vow that you won't hurt me?" He asked in a low tone.

The painting had his arms crossed and was looking at his fingernails. "I agreed that I wouldn't kill you. Not that I won't hurt you." He said nonchalantly.

"You're a complete bastard, has anyone told you that?" Harry snapped.

"Yes, and those who did died immediately after uttering those words." The painting stalked forward and slammed his hands on each side of Harry’s head, his face close to Harry’s, dominating his entire field of view. He pressed up against Harry, pushing him into the wall, “Would you prefer if I simpered over you? If I sucked you off and then fucked you into submission? Is that what you want? Some compliant dark lord to do your bidding? I am not him. I am what he should be.” He said coolly, threat dripping from each word.

Harry was uncomfortable with how close he was to him, the paintings breath hot on his neck. If it had been Tom he might have gotten aroused, but this version was clearly not Tom.

Harry ducked out from under the paintings arm and circled to the other side of the room. The man’s arctic gaze followed him the entire way, “How did Tom make you able to interact with the outer world? Did he invent some sort of magic to allow it?” He asked, hoping to change the subject.

"That is not your concern. I know you seek to unmake me."

Harry rolled his eyes, "I seek to understand you."

"Of course you do." He replied sarcastically.

Harry stormed across the room and grabbed the shirt the painting was wearing, the soft fabric wrinkling under his fingers. "I do! We need to work together or get along or something. What's our step one? What do we need to do first?"

"Our first step will be for us to communicate outside your dreams, and that will take work on your part." The painting took a step backwards and Harry let out a sigh of relief as space opened between them. Grabbing him hadn’t been his best idea.

Harry nodded, “I figured it would since you’re locked up.”

"Our second step is to retrieve what was stolen by Flint and Nott." He continued, ignoring Harry.

Harry blinked, "Octavius Flint and Ulysses Nott stole something from Tom?"

The painting pursed his lips, "Avery was entrusted with something and they stole it from him."

"What was it they stole?"

"That's not your concern at the moment. We nee---"

"It could be my concern. What if I ended up at their homes and it was just sitting there staring me in the face where I could steal it for him?"

"That will not be the case."

"Are you sure? I know Theo Nott and Marcus Flint. My godfather is a Black and his brother is a friend of mine."

The painting sneered, "Regulus Black will not be able to help."
Harry grumbled, this version of Tom was a controlling know-it-all and it bothered him immensely, "Fine. I think you should tell me about Nott, Avery and Flint."

"Did you research Avery this last week?"

"Was I supposed to?"

"It would have been preferable."

"I was researching magical paintings and occlumency ever since a magical painting broke into my head last week."

"Valid point."

"This is going to be a long night, isn't it?" Harry asked. Should you be able to feel tired in your dreams?

"When you are trapped in a painted canvas for eternity then you can tell me what a long time is. Sit." The painting waved his hand and two chairs appeared in the room. They were less chair then giant piece of wood carved to have a hollow sitting place. Either he didn't care for anything ornate or he didn't have the ability to make it so.

He probably just didn't care. He seemed like he didn’t care.

Harry sat down and cocked his head at the long-limbed man across from him, he was Tom, he looked like him and sounded like him but something had seemed a little off. Maybe it was the dream world they were in, but he seemed stretched a bit. Too tall, too gaunt, too feral looking to be able to function outside of a nightmare.

The painting took a deep breath, "I attended school with the three of them. We were not on friendly terms for the early years due to my supposed blood status, but when they learned that not only was I a parslemouth and heir to Slytherin, and the fact that I have and will always be the most powerful wizard to walk the face of this earth, they hastened to amend their attitudes. They became my followers."

Harry raised a brow.

"Had the Gaunt line not destroyed itself with gambling, and mental illness caused by inbreeding, I could have had a chance to claim a seat in Conclave but the line had been removed for many years."

Harry nodded. He knew this from researching Tom.

"I could have entered the Ministry and worked my way up through that dreadful hierarchy and dulled my shine, but instead I went out, traveled the world and learned everything the world would teach me. Dark magic, light magic, it didn't matter, I learned it all with the knowledge that when I decided it was time to return to England that I would be able to take it."

". . . This has been in the works since you were in Hogwarts?" Harry didn’t know if he was impressed or horrified; this was decades of work between them. Harry didn’t know if he had the fortitude to make plans that had fifty years of leeway.

"Yes. Avery, Nott, Flint and Lestrange, before he died, had agreed to pave the way for the heir of Slytherin to take the throne. We came back a little later then they would have preferred but it wasn't like they had a choice in the matter. I am the only one capable to take the throne." He sniffed the air and looked towards the painting that Harry had been steadfastly ignoring.
That was a question for another day.

"You take the throne and they get richer and more powerful?"

The painting nodded.

"They're pretty rich and powerful already. Why do they need more?"

"Once you have a taste, you become an addict and you will always want more. It is the nature of the beast."

Harry shrugged at that. He somehow doubted that was the case and it had more to do with inbreeding and a mental decision that if you were rich you were right. "I assume they worked to remove most evidence or people's memories of you while you were gone and then upon your return no one would remember the handsome Slytherin head boy of years past."

A small inclination of the head. "They also arranged for some laws to be altered and passed early on. No one would notice or think about it."

"Why did you decide that they would prefer a younger king over an older, more experienced man?" Harry pressed, figuring this was his one chance to get as many answers as he could. He also tried not to think about how he liked his partners as older and experienced. Not that he would admit it out loud.

The painting raised an eyebrow, "Would you prefer having an older person coming out of nowhere, declaring himself to be the king or would you prefer an underdog that has recently had it revealed to him that he is the heir to Slytherin? A handsome man who may be idealistic but is an optimist despite it all. Who can worm his way into people’s hearts instead of some wheeling and dealing man that no one knows anything about? The public will prefer a younger man”

Harry nodded; it was a way to appeal to the public at large but not the politicians who preferred people with experience.

"Why did Flint and Nott turn against you?"

The painting clenched his jaw, "They wanted more control over my counterpart. He has been playing a bit more fast and loose than they would prefer. It may also be an insurance policy for them since he had Lestrange killed. Afraid that he will come for them."

Harry sat up straighter. He didn't know much about the Lestrange patriarch except that he had died a few years back in an accident. An accident that apparently deserved to have quotations around it.

"What did Lestrange do?"

"Attempted to back out. He believed my counterpart was unbalanced and was seeking to overthrow the Sacred 27." The painting stated matter-of-factly.

"And why was that?" Harry asked, more than slightly concerned.

"Because it's true. Lestrange was never the closest of my followers. He always remembered what my father was and where I came from. He also believed my counterpart was too quick to accept some people into his circle."

"Like?"
"Snape for being a half blood, his daughter in law for being a woman. Bellatrix may have the disadvantage of being born female but she makes up for it in loyalty and sheer bloody mindedness."

"Have you had her... kill people?"

"Who do you think killed Lestrange? As if my counterpart would sully his hands doing that..."

"Does Avery, Nott and Flint know that it was Bellatrix?"

"No. They only know Lord Slytherin was responsible."

Harry frowned, "Was there no way to convince him that you were on the same side? Did he have to die?"

"Even you, with your naive and somewhat positive outlook on life, have to acknowledge that sometimes people need to die for a common goal. Lestrange was not a good man." He sneered.

"Is anyone actually good?" Harry asked. He had noticed the insult but he wasn’t going to comment.

"Oh, shut up. I've given you a brief outline of the situation, I will assist you with occlumency at a later point, what I currently require of you is to arrange a meeting with Lord Slytherin. He has something that we can use to communicate."

As he spoke, Harry wished he could have brought a notebook into his dream.

Chapter End Notes

Woweeeee this one took a while to appear but with a combination of illness, writers block, the tomarry big bang on tumblr, and Destiny 2 appearing in my life I was unable to put fingers to keyboard as much as I wanted to.
Next chapter should be out in a more timely manner!
Chapter 18

Wednesday, January 14th

Harry slid between the densely packed library shelves and brushed the dust off the leather spines. Not many students bothered to come into this area of the stacks, and with good reason - it was cramped, dusty, and the material was generally unneeded by Hogwarts students. Before him was every issue of the Daily Prophet, dating back to 1743 when it was founded. He was currently browsing through the 1950s, having finished with the 1940s yesterday.

He grabbed the bound copies of September 1953 through to January 1954 and attempted to sidle out from between the shelves with his heavy load, covering his robes with dust no matter how hard he tried to stay clean. Harry crept towards the light at the end and burst forth, relieved to be breathing air that wasn't centuries worth of grime.

"Harry? What are you doing back here?" Hermione stood about three feet away, holding her own set of books. She was as covered in dust as he was, a large streak imprinted on her side made it appear she was wearing a grey robe instead of black.

"Doing some light reading. You?" He said jokingly, hefting his books under his arm.

"Same." Hermione replied with an impish grin, "Do you already have a table? We could share the one I have."

Harry had not, in fact, grabbed a table when he had arrived; instead he had hastened to the shelves first, "Yeah, that would be good."

Hermione led the way from the stacks towards a table that was in a darker corner of the library, at least it looked like it was stable. "I hope you haven't been caught out of school with Lord Slytherin again," she teased.

Harry bit back a blush, "Me? Sneaking out of school to see someone? I would never dream of that. I am a straight O student that does nothing wrong." He replied with a wink. He was happy to see Hermione was in a better mood. The two of them had been having some strained interactions of late. It was good to be able to banter a bit. Even if it was at his expense.

"I think you're confused- you just described me," Hermione replied cheekily, pulling out a notebook and opening the smallest of her collection of archival books.

Harry opened the first of his collection of Prophet articles and frowned at the aged sheets. Merlin, he hated the texture of newsprint, it was like chewing on aluminum foil. "So, what are you researching?" From what he could see, it was a large set of Hogwarts records dating back several centuries ago.

"Just an extra thing I decided to do for History of Magic. Hogwarts and its iterations through the years. It's fascinating what changes it has undergone since it was built!" She said excitedly, "Hogwarts: A History covers a fair amount of it but being able to see the records myself is so much better. Did you know there used to be a moat, but they had to fill it in because of student's falling in."
"I had no idea. Imagine if there was a giant squid in a moat and the lake?"

"They could wave at each other." She said, "It would be pretty amusing to have a moat still, but imagine the first years or inebriated seventh years falling in." Hermione gave him a pointed look.

"I think it would be better if we had a ha-ha. Taking a walk on the field and suddenly falling a few feet to break your ankles." Harry mused.

"A ha-ha?"

Harry had a sudden deer in the headlight moment as he tried to figure out how to describe it, "On the old estates they have these sudden drop-offs in the landscape to prevent animals from getting close to the house; they use it instead of a fence because it leaves the view pristine."

Hermione sat back, "I did not know those had a name. Well, I would not be surprised if they had had them and that was exactly what happened. I'll look it up later." She jotted down a note in her book.

With a silent agreement, they began to work on their own projects. Harry wasn't sure what he was looking for exactly. Stuff about Nott, Flint, Lestrange, and Avery.

Mainly Avery.

The painting had told him a bit more about Avery and he felt the need to know about the man from a relatively unbiased source but there was hardly anything in the Prophet. It did make sense that there was nothing since the painting had told him that Avery worked behind the scenes. He wondered if Lucius or Regulus knew anything. It wasn't likely that Lucius would tell him if he did. Regulus was more likely to answer, but he still hadn't spoken to him recently. Best to send him a letter sometime soon.

Harry flipped through, scanning the pages -or maybe Draco knew something- Lucius had loose lips around Draco and the blond had a habit of picking up little tidbits of information that he would usually pass onto Harry... for a price. He jotted down a note to himself to ask Draco what he knew about Avery. He would have to ensure that Draco would keep it on the down low. The painting was paranoid, but occasionally paranoid people were right.

He stopped, making a note of a wedding announcement between Augustus Avery and Vivian Macmillan set for December 31st, 1953, roughly eight years after he graduated Hogwarts... he would have been around 25 which is a bit late for most pureblood marriages. Generally, they were announced within 2-3 years of graduating and there was a long betrothal period of another year or two before a ceremony was held.

He continued flipping through the articles, making notes of interesting laws that were passed and repealed, but he almost wished the library had a collection of Witch Weekly or one of the socialite magazines. It was impossible to find anything this way.

Even if he couldn't find anything about Avery he was enjoying his time with a friend. He understood Hermione's anger and distance with him since he had gotten involved with Slytherin. All she saw was a friend going over to a side that advocated treating muggleborns as scum. He couldn't tell her that Tom wasn't out to kill her or enslave her or treat her like filth, he wanted to let her know that he hadn't become some blood purist out to hurt her, but he couldn't, not yet. With enough time she might even consider joining Tom if she knew the real him... 

The real problem was that if she knew about people potentially being murdered or obliviated, she would protest because she was a good person. Hermione could be a little intense, but her heart was
in the right place. She believed in the rights and welfare of all species. In his mind, that is what good people did. They believed in equality and pushed for it. Given the recent developments with Octavius Flint and his house elf breeding program, Harry could understand her continued crusade for the rights of house elves.

Harry pursed his lips, Octavius Flint was probably going to die within the next few years. Maybe the house elves could be freed or purchased from Marcus. Tom would have the power as king to seize their property. Maybe they could hire Hermione to help the house elves find homes. . . 

Harry wouldn't be surprised if Tom could convince Hermione to work with him. He was persuasive and he had good points, but Harry wanted to leave that up to Tom. It wasn't his place to do so, this was Tom's plan not Harry's.

Hermione stood up, "Watch my spot for me? I'll be right back."

Harry nodded and watched her go before getting up and flattening himself across the table and looking at the top book Hermione had.

Maintenance logs.

It was a NEWT year and she was reading maintenance logs. Harry slid back into his own spot, shaking his head sadly. He would never be that bored.

Hermione was gone for around thirty minutes and in that time, he made his way through October of 1953 and had begun November to no information being found.

"How's your research going?" She asked as she pulled over her book again and flipped through.

"Alright, did we get an updated copy of the Blackwood's peerage this year?"

"I think I saw that it was on the new book list." Hermione muttered, "If you're looking up someone from the 1950's I would suggest checking to see if there is a copy from around that time frame instead."

Harry raised a brow. She made a valid point, "Does Pince keep all the old copies?"

"I think they get put into storage. If not, we do know a helpful room." Hermione said coyly.

Harry stared at her blankly until his brain kicked into gear and he realized she was talking about the room of requirement, "You're right. I'll check that out in a bit if Pince won't tell me where the storage is."

They once again fell into silence as they researched their respective topics; Harry grabbing the most recent peerage book and Hermione delving into the dusty stacks to retrieve some other lost book of Hogwarts being fixed up.

"Harry?"

"Hmmm?"

"I wanted to thank you for arranging a meeting with Lord Slytherin. It means a lot to me."

"You're my friend and I know you've been. . . upset about things, but I want you to meet him"

Hermione nodded, "I know. I just wanted to thank you." She tapped her quill on her parchment. "Harry, I don't have the money or the connections that you do. All I have is my intelligence and
drive. You understand? I am going to have to claw my way up.” Hermione said earnestly.

Harry nodded, "I understand. Hermione, please know that you can always come to me and I will help."

"Thank you," she said quietly.

There was a slight commotion back at the busier end of the library and they both looked up to see McGonagall rush through to Pince, whisper something in her ear and rush back out.

Pince stood up shakily, her face ashen and clapped her hands, getting everyone's attention, "The library is closing now! Everyone go down to the Great Hall! Professor McGonagall needs to make an announcement to the school. Leave the books where they are!" She commanded and began to shoo people out of the room.

"What's going on?" Hermione whispered.

Harry shrugged. He had never seen anything like this before at Hogwarts, "It must be serious."

"What?"

"What do you mean what?"

"Like your godfather did something?"

Harry laughed, as much as he hated to admit it serious Sirius jokes would never get old for him, "If he's in the Great Hall with his head stuck in the toilet I will eat my underwear."

"I'll hold you to that." Hermione said with a chuckle, "How were your detentions?"

Sneaking out of the school to meet with one of Tom's lieutenants, and Tom showing up and then turning into a mess of thrusting and bodily fluids had been rather enjoyable. The only real plus of a somewhat unpleasant night, "They were fine. I'm happy that it wasn't my mum who was in charge. I would have been writing lines probably."

"Oh? Like I will not sneak off grounds to have sexual relations?"

He cringed. "Maybe."

They made their way out of the library and down to the Great Hall with a crowd of students, all voicing questions about why they were being summoned. As they approached the Great Hall, bumping into other students near the back, they realized they were the last batch to arrive. Harry and Hermione pushed their way forward into the middle of the crowd, looking at the teachers at the end of the room. McGonagall and the rest of the staff stood at the head table, talking amongst themselves.

"Sprout is crying." Whispered Hermione.

"She's not the only one." His mother stood next to Sprout, looking stoic but her eyes were red-rimmed. She had been crying.

He knew what this was.

Dumbledore was dead.

He was the only staff member not present, and back in December Tom had told him that Dumbledore was not going to be an issue. That he was to be killed. That he would send someone to
assassinate him. Sweet Circle, it actually happened. He felt bile in the back of his throat.

McGonagall walked up to the pulpit -Harry could see that she had been crying- and the students quieted down almost immediately, "Students, it's with a heavy heart I am forced to announce that our beloved headmaster Albus Dumbledore has passed on this afternoon."

Hermione gasped loudly, clamping a hand over her mouth as tears sprung to her eyes. He didn't know why she reacted as she did, as he doubted that Hermione and Dumbledore had spoken before.

"Classes are canceled for the rest of the day as we recover from this tragedy. Any further announcements will be posted in your common rooms," McGonagall stepped away, wiping at her eyes.

That seemed to be the whole announcement, thankfully brief and to the point as a memorial would likely be held later, but the terse nature of it reminded him that the school was in a crisis now. McGonagall was the deputy and the transfiguration teacher, they would have to overcome her taking over administrative duties and find a different transfiguration professor or find a new headmaster. It would not be a pleasant transition time.

"What'd he die of?" Harry heard a nearby Ravenclaw whisper to their friend as they began to exit the great hall, "He seemed fine last time we saw him."

The last time he had seen Dumbledore was when he and Tom had had their dalliance at the Hog's Head. He didn't remember seeing him at all during dinner. The world tipped, and his head spun with a wave of dizziness, he fell with a heavy thud onto the bench behind him.

Dumbledore had been assassinated. It must have been a quick but subtle curse or poison. . . Had Snape done it? It was the only reason he could think that Snape might apply for the Defence position. To arrange Dumbledore's death. Tom had said he would send someone to do it.

Oh, Merlin, this was the start of the deaths.

"Harry? Are you okay?" Hermione touched his shoulder and looked at him, her brow furrowed in concern.

"I'm fine. Just felt faint for a second. It's a bit crowded is all." He said weakly and stood up, brushing his robes off.

He needed to put his morals aside if Tom was going to succeed. Dumbledore had lived a long life and would have gotten in the way of progress, him dying was for the greater good.

"I'm going to go see how my mum is." He muttered and left Hermione in the crowd and pushed his way through the departing students.

Most of the teachers had remained up at the head table. Harry slowed his pace and cast an eavesdropping charm on them as he approached, hoping to pick up a snippet.

"-n't believe it. It was so sudden." said Pomfrey before blowing her nose.

"It happens, Poppy. Sometime people will get sick and pass. It happened to James' parents." His grandparents had passed from Dragonpox when he was an infant and he had no memories of them.

"Mum?" Harry said quietly as he came up behind her, "Are you okay?"

Lily turned with a jump before recognizing him and putting a hand on his shoulder, "I've been
better." She guided him to the side, away from the other staff members who had gone silent when he had approached, "How are you, sweetie?"

Harry shrugged, "I'm fine, I just know you were close to him." He pulled her into a hug, one that she tightened, holding onto so tight that he could barely breathe.

"Don't get hurt sweetie." She whispered into his ear and released him, but still held onto his arms, "Look at you. You're all grown up." She gave him a sad smile and kissed him on his forehead, "I have to go for now."

Lily turned on her heel, looked to McGonagall and the senior staff, and left the room through a side door.

Why did she tell him to be safe? Harry stood still, his mind blank with worry. Did she know something? Did she think he was involved? Did she think Tom was involved? Did she have evidence? Oh, Merlin what was going on?

He slowly made his way out of the hall and headed to the dungeons, pondering the situation. Dumbledore's death was arranged, yes, and it has happened before Conclave. Some of the more paranoid people might suspect some sort of foul play, but the majority of people would acknowledge that he was old and the timing was pure coincidence.

He highly doubted that Snape would have left evidence. His father barely ever knew when Snape had visited his mother for a chit chat and he was trained to see evidence.

He leaned against a wall as he thought about it, the problem with poison or a curse was that it could let people linger. Let them make plans and talk to people. Harry bit his lip. Had Dumbledore told his mother about Tom? About his past?

Even if he had, his mother wouldn't be able to do anything about it. As much as he loved and admired her, she was still a muggleborn witch that had married well. She didn't have Dumbledore's political power.

Had Dumbledore had the foresight to warn anybody?

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_Saturday, January 17th_

Tom looked at the mirror and gave his sleeve a tug, before attaching his cufflinks. Dumbledore's death had thrown the Wizengamot into a minor crisis as they hurried to elect a new head. Dumbledore's followers within the Sacred 27 were panicking as well. The entire political landscape was currently in chaos and he was thriving off it. A bit of money thrown in the right spot, and Lucius whispering in the right ears was only aiding his cause. There was no one for his followers to throw themselves behind. They had no great figurehead to stand against him.

If only he had dealt with him sooner.

The past few mornings he had read the newspapers with a pleased smile. They were all singing his praises and lauding his deeds, ignoring his hypocrisies and lies.

What a fraud.

He had researched Harry's accusations of Dumbledore having a history with Grindelwald and it had been true. His follower that had snuck into the Bagshot home and the abandoned Dumbledore residence had been shocked. Character assassination was an amazing tool, you may only die once in
your life but character assassination worked *every* day. Fortunately, regular assassination had sufficed. Smearing his name could wait for later. Maybe they could put a leash on Skeeter and utilize her.

He glanced in the mirror again and practiced an appropriate expression; it needed to be solemn and respectful, not a farce of sadness with a shaking bottom lip.

His practiced frown turned into a smirk at the thought of Dumbledore slowly succumbing to the poison. Ricin was not a pleasant death. He would have to arrange some sort of boon for Severus.

Tom twisted the ring on his finger, thumb brushing over the stone that was set within. The question now was what would happen to the supposedly unbeatable wand. He was tempted to take it as his own and reunite it with the ring, but his yew wand continued to satisfy him. He had never lost with it. He touched the ivory handle of it lovingly and slid it into his sleeve.

Would he be buried with it? If Dumbledore chose to have an open casket he could just take it. Not that he was above grave robbing. It wouldn't be the first time.

The elder wand could wait.

The funeral would take place at Hogwarts. Must the man continue to lay claim over something that was not his? The ministry had refused to allow the man to be entombed at the school, instead insisting that Godric's Hollow was the more appropriate place. If they hadn't, he would have dug up the old goat himself and chucked him in the lake out of spite. Let the squid have him.

Hogwarts was no longer Dumbledore's to control.

Tom left his dressing room and nodded to Lucius, who had been waiting for him outside, "Has the Board of Governors decided on a new Headmaster?"

"McGonagall was chosen."

"As expected, and the deputy? Fliitwick or Sprout, I assume." Tom slid on a pair of doe-skin gloves as they began to head downstairs.

"Lily Potter. She will also be taking over as Head of Gryffindor." Lucius said stiffly.

Tom blinked, that was unexpected, "Once I take the crown we will allow for more funding for Hogwarts. They require support staff that doesn't double as professors. What will be happening with McGonagall's classes?"

Lucius shrugged, "They are currently looking for a temporary Transfiguration professor until they can hire a full time one."

Tom contemplated the issue as they entered the foyer, "Do we have anyone who could fill that role? Preferably, someone we wouldn't miss."

"Crouch could." Lucius supplied quickly.

"No," Tom stated firmly. Crouch may be troublesome but he was useful, "The Black family is known to be talented with transfiguration."

Lucius stilled, his brows knitting together until it looked like they had become a unibrow, "The Black family? Regulus you mean?"
"Or Narcissa. Your wife is a talented witch." Tom turned on the spot, apparating to the gates of Hogwarts with a small crack. Lucius appeared a moment later and then began their trek up to the castle.

"I am uncertain that Narcissa would be a suitable contender for the position. She helps manage the Malfoy estate, and the same goes for Regulus."

"Hmm." Tom said, being purposely ambivalent with the express purpose of upsetting him, "It would be a pity if Sirius Black was installed as a Transfiguration Professor."

Lucius scoffed, "Sirius? He's useless. Regulus gives him a stipend to live off and all the man does is philander and waste his money. He has no use in Hogwarts."

"But he is friends with the Deputy Headmistress and is personable. Then again, maybe James Potter will be hired. I understand there have been issues at the Auror office recently. Tell me of it."

The blond grimaced, "Director Crouch has been erratic as of late, rampant accusations and paranoia. James Potter is on a disciplinary suspension for disrespecting his superior. Alice Longbottom has received a warning for defending Potter as well," Lucius trailed off, "I will speak to some of our people and find someone suitable for the Transfiguration position."

"Excellent."

Tom had tried to not think of Harry as they approached. Tried not to think how he would be near him. He had not expected that he would see Harry again so soon, but he was seemingly drawn to him. Today he would have to be on his best behavior. Not making eyes at a Hogwarts student as the press would expect him to.

"How is your son?"

Lucius turned his head to him minutely, the only sound as he thought was the crunch of snow under their feet, "He is... well, my Lord. He is preparing for his NEWT's."

"And what will Draco be doing after Hogwarts?"

"After Hogwarts, he will learn to run the estate and some of the businesses. He will also start attending Conclave as an observer."

"He will not look for a career outside the family businesses? Narcissa tells me that his grades are exceptional." Tom said, a smirk on his lips. Dumbledore's death had clearly put him in a good mood if he was tormenting Lucius.

"I do not believe so. He is free to approach me and tell me if there is something he wants to learn as well but his responsibilities will remain to be the Malfoy estate."

Tom nodded, "Of course, it will be quite a while before he takes over from you. Plenty of time for him to expand his knowledge."

Lucius pursed his lips, "One can hope. Is there something you have in mind for him?"

"Hmm? No. Not yet." Tom said absently. He didn't know if he wanted the younger Malfoy to remain friends with Harry. He would be politically advantageous up until it was time to topple the government. Harry was a sentimental sort, would probably have issues with his friend dying. He might still have his muggleborn friend unless he alienated her. He loathed to admit it but he hoped the girl would remain as his friend. Harry was overly fond of her and wanted to recruit her to their
cause.

Somehow.

There was a loud bang of the castle doors opening and a group of bundled-up students walked out towards the greenhouses, ignoring their approach. Just a few Ravenclaws skiving off the funeral. He didn't blame them.

Tom said nothing as they approached the open doors of Hogwarts. His first home. His shelter away from Wools. Hogwarts was so many things to him, including his first love, but now he was being forced to act as if he did not know her intimately.

He ached to return to the Chamber of Secrets, but it would not do well to be caught sneaking out of Dumbledore's funeral and into the girl's bathroom.

Corvinus Gaunt was a right prick for hiding it where he did.

As he passed through the door his fingers trailed against the intricately carved wood and he looked up to the ceiling and architecture, appreciating each and every stone.

Dumbledore was dead and he was soon to be King. Hogwarts would be part of his domain. She would retain her former greatness, the students who passed through the doors would no longer have a bloody ghost teaching them, they would have more teachers and classes.

Yes, it was decades later and he was still upset about Alchemy being canceled years before he went to Hogwarts. He had his right to be. Merlin, he was still upset about Muggles destroying magical artifacts centuries ago.

Lucius coughed, pulling him from his reverie, "This way, my Lord." He guided him through to the Great Hall where there was a wide variety of people gathered. None of the students were present yet. There was an open area in front near the casket and hundreds of chairs were set up for when the funeral began. The house tables were missing completely. There were also a few house elves wandering around offering beverages.

There was a line of people paying their respects at Dumbledore's marble casket.

He would only do so to spit in his eye. Sadly, it was closed.

Tom eyed a few people as he made his way towards with Lucius. The Prophet had sent someone who was not Rita Skeeter, thank Morgana. Witch Weekly had also made a showing; there were quite a few representatives from international news services. They were all mingling among the nobles, politicians and Dumbledore's sycophants. Tom pointedly ignored the unseeing eyes of Augustus Avery. He had no desire to deal with him.

He and Lucius drew close to a crowd that contained Horace Slughorn, Madame Maxine of Beauxbatons, Alice and Frank Longbottom, Lily Potter, and a reporter he believed to be Bernard Crocker of the Prophet.

He was still slightly fond of his former head of house, even if the man was a little ineffectual as a Slytherin. Everything the man knew about people could have been used to a profound effect, but he had been content to remain as a potion master.

Maybe he would make a late-night visit one day and learn all the secrets he knew and follow it up with an obliviate or an avada kedavra.
"Lord Slytherin, I didn't expect to see you here." Lily Potter was the first to acknowledge his presence, "I did not believe you and Albus were particularly close." Her expression to him was cold, even if her eyes were red from shed tears.

"We may not have been close but he was an influence. I am here to pay my respects. Where would we be if Albus Dumbledore had not been born?" Tom mused, looking solemn. He was slightly pleased that he had not choked saying that.

Madame Maxine blew her nose loudly into a handkerchief, "His work with alchemy has been so important to ze world."

"Probably living under the reign of a Dark Lord." Slughorn said morosely, "This younger generation didn't know what it was like to fear Grindelwald."

"We wouldn't know the twelve uses of dragon blood," came from Frank Longbottom.

"Unemployed," muttered Lily.

The group lapsed into silence and he fought the urge to scoff. He had meant it as a rhetorical question, but there they went... It really should be nine uses of Dragon's Blood. Oven cleaner, spot, and verruca remover should not count. Those were all things that could be done with magic and did not cost exorbitant amounts of money.

Merlin, he could not get over what a twat Dumbledore was.

"Lord Slytherin, may I get a quote from you?" asked the reporter.

Tom nodded and left Lucius and the mourners behind. He had no desire to congregate with Dumbledore's sycophants. They found an alcove where they were separated from the groupings of people.

Tom cocked his head to the side and took in the sight of the wizard before him; he wore dark grey robes and had brown eyes and tawny hair. He also could not make eye contact with Tom.

The younger man stuttered and flushed under his red-eyed gaze. Not that Crocker was young, he appeared to be in his mid-forties, but Tom being in his seventies, almost everyone was young to him. One day everyone would be young to him...

Crocker chewed his lip and pulled out a notebook, "My Lord, it is a great honour to speak with you. May I have your thoughts regarding the passing of Albus Dumbledore?"

Tom gave the reporter a benign smile causing him to blush. He stopped himself from laughing. Merlin, the reporter fancied him. How delightful.

"I respected Albus Dumbledore, and he shall be missed greatly. He helped make Britain into what it is today and his passing is unfortunate. I wish that I had had the opportunity to face off against him in the political arena," Tom bowed his head, "I am sure the Wizengamot will find a new leader that will respect the changes that Albus Dumbledore made but will also be able to embrace new ideas to help our society advance into the twenty-first century."

The reporter hastily wrote everything he said, glancing up at him every few seconds. "It is wonderful that you thought so highly of him even if you were on opposing sides."

"We had opposing ideals. Not sides. We both want what is best for the Wizarding Britain."
Crocker nodded, "Apologies." The man glanced at him, "Do you think his passing will affect your chances at Conclave?"

"I do not feel that this is an appropriate time to discuss this," Tom scolded, but his inner hypocrite added, "but I feel confident in my chances at Conclave. Whatever happens, happens."

There was a sudden shower of sparks near the front. McGonagall stood at the podium, "The students will be joining us soon. If we can all take our seats."

"Thank you for your time, Lord Slytherin," Crocker muttered and made his way towards the front row of seats.

Tom frowned and followed, sitting in the mid-front next to Lucius and a few of the other nobles in attendance. He pointedly ignored Avery who sat nearby.

It wasn't long before there was a rumbling sound of hundreds of feet approaching and entering the Great Hall. He remained looking forward, even though he knew Harry was somewhere within the crowd.

At some point, James Potter had appeared and was seated next to his wife. Lily Potter was an interesting woman. A muggleborn that was friends with a blood-purist, married to a liberal-minded pureblood and had managed to acquire a coveted position as professor of Hogwarts. She was talented from what he had heard and Harry clearly thought the world of her. She was clearly a suspicious woman, but he imagined you had to be with Harry eavesdropping everywhere.

He remained seated, staring at Dumbledore's casket. He could always steal Dumbledore's corpse and make an inferus out of it one day. That would be amusing.

The students finished making their way in and settled down over the course of the next ten minutes and Elphias Doge made his way up to the pulpit. He spoke of Dumbledore's kindness, his greatness, how he influenced generations of people to be kinder and more accepting. That they should honour his memory by being better.

Tom listened with an impassive expression but had to fight the urge to roll his eyes through the entire speech. Well, yes, it was nice that Dumbledore spoke to you, a pureblood, when you had dragonpox but please remember the supposed muggleborns he returned to London during the blitz. Not the actions of a great man.

Prick.

Person after person climbed up and lamented about Albus Dumbledore and by the end, he was ready to go up and explain why he was ineffectual, lazy, and corrupt and that the only way to bring forth real change was with a revolution.

An hour of teary-eyed worshippers later, McGonagall stood up and gave the final speech. Allowing them to stand and mingle. The real reason he had decided to attend.

The majority of students left. There were a few weepy eyed Gryffindors and Hufflepuffs -Why were they even present? It wasn't as if any of them knew the man, or had even spoken to him- A few Slytherins were taking the opportunity to speak to the assembled guests that were present, even if they were mostly Dumbledore's toadies. The young Malfoy spawn was approaching at this very moment, his presence was made slightly more tolerable due to the fact that he was bringing Harry along with him.

"Lord Slytherin," Draco said, bowing low, "It is an honour."
Tom inclined his head, "Your father has told me you are doing quite well this year. I am impressed, to do so while still getting in quidditch practice must be quite difficult. We will see great things of you."

The young blond flushed brightly and his head bobbed like a chicken feeding, "Thank you, my Lord. I am honoured."

Lucius put a hand on Draco's back, "If you don't mind, I would like to speak to Draco."

Tom nodded his head, assenting for them to leave, which left him and Harry alone. How thoughtful of Lucius.

He had no explanation for it but seeing Harry pleased him. He may be young but he was clever, Harry had discovered his identity and knew Dumbledore's secrets without being prompted to seek them out.

"My Lord," Harry bowed, a cheeky smirk on his lips. "It is a pity that such an unfortunate event has drawn us together." His face grew somber, the grin melting off. He knew that Dumbledore had been assassinated, that it was not an unfortunate case of illness.

How much did it weigh on his conscience?

"Mister Potter, it is good to see you again." Tom replied, eyeing him heavily, "It is a pity that our last meeting was interrupted as it was."

"I agree wholeheartedly. Hermione has expressed her thanks again for you agreeing to meet her. Did you decide on where we would meet?"

"The Hogs Head doesn't seem all too reliable. I am not opposed to the Three Broomsticks."

Harry nodded, "Sounds like a plan. We could meet earlier but she refuses to sneak out and would prefer to wait for a Hogsmeade weekend."

"And I thought Gryffindors liked to break the rules. I am shocked." He chuckled.

"Hermione tends to be well behaved- hold still," Harry said his eyes focusing on Tom's shoulder, "There's a beetle on your robe."

Tom watched as Harry flicked a large blue-green beetle off his shoulder and onto Frank Longbottom's back, "Just a bit to the left and it would have been in his pocket."

"That's why I would have played Seeker over Chaser," Harry said lightly, grabbing a glass of wine from a passing house elf, "I didn't expect to see you so soon again."

Tom cast a muffilito around them, "I didn't expect Dumbledore would request his funeral to be within the school."

"I heard that he wanted to be buried on the grounds."

Tom nodded, "He did, but it was denied by the ministry."

"Thank Merlin. That would be odd going past a tomb or grave or something like that."

"Or people vandalizing said tombs."

"I don't think anyone would do that." Harry gave him a bemused grin.
"Speak for yourself," Tom muttered, looking away for a moment.

There was a slightly awkward silence between them, as if being surrounded by all these people were making them incapable of speaking as they usually did. He felt no desire to be subtle with Harry.

"Are you going to be here for long?" Harry swirled his wine around, watching the red spiral.

"I am required to mingle a bit, no matter how much fun it would be to leave." And it would be fun. He was entertaining the notion of going to the Chamber of Secrets with Harry and doing some delightfully wicked things with him.

"I was thinking about sneaking out this weekend to bother you at your home, but, well. . ." He looked at Dumbledore's casket, "that happened."

They noticed an increase in murmurs around them, and turned to see several people looking at them, Lucius on the outside looking at Harry with a frown, "You are welcome to join me at my home later. . ." Tom mused, "You can get there correct?"

Harry flushed and nodded, "I'll probably wait an hour after you leave before coming."

Tom gave him a cheeky smirk, "I hope it doesn't take you too long to come."

Harry's eyes went wide at the double entendre, as Tom walked away, breaking the charm.

Harry had loitered around, sneaking glasses of wine and watching group after group seek Tom out to speak to him. Some sucking up to him, others decrying his policies, but Tom took it all in stride, his words twisting around and through them like a serpent in water.

It was fascinating. He was so poised and handsome, and no one expected him to be as astute as he was because of how young he looked. Just another advantage he had. The mind of a seventy-year-old, body of a twenty-year-old.

He certainly took Dumbledore by surprise, but Dumbledore knew who Tom was. . . Why did Dumbledore underestimate him? Maybe he didn't suspect how determined Tom was.

It was clear, to Harry, that he was driven, you don't just manage to show up looking decades younger and with the support of the ancient families.

Harry hadn't expected to see Tom today, but knowing that he would be present ensured that the plan with the painting would happen in a timely manner. He had expected Dumbledore's death to delay him. Getting to Riddle manor was part of the plan and Tom had thankfully invited him to meet.

He had gone back to the dorm after a bit of mingling of his own, said he was going to bed early, spelled his curtains shut and snuck out of the castle behind the last group of guests.

Now, he stood outside the gate, waiting for them to leave his line of sight so he could apparate without them hearing.

Harry visualized Riddle Manor in his mind and twisted on his heel, apparating away.

The squeezing sensation of apparition was present but sharp pain lanced through his shoulder like it was being ground against a tunnel of razor wire that flayed his flesh from his arm.

He landed in the snow, crumpling into a heap on the ground as he slipped. Circe's tits it hurt! Fearfully, he looked to his arm, where an apple-sized wound was gouged out from it. Blood and
viscera filled his vision, making his head spin. He could see musculature and, he felt bile rise, bone. Blood was pouring from it, filling the cavity.

He looked up. Riddle Manor was only 30-feet away. Shakily, he climbed to his feet, his vision going dark as he made his way towards the door. He gathered up his scarf and held it against the wound, hissing at the pain that shot through him, making him stumble.

He slowly made his way to the door, wavering on his feet, cursing the wine he had drunk earlier and the fact that he bloody splinched himself. His vision wavered and he vomited as another roll of pain traveled through him, "I am not going into shock." He whispered.

Those thirty feet felt like they were three hundred, it took forever to arrive but he did it eventually. "I'm going to cut back on the alcohol. Never know when you're going to splinch yourself like a bloody Hufflepuff."

Harry climbed the steps and rested against the doorway arch, before kicking the door, announcing his presence. A wary-eyed house elf opened the door, "Please go get your master," he commanded before walking past it and into the foyer.

The elf vanished with a loud crack, leaving Harry alone in the foyer.

He pressed his back against the wall and slid down to the floor, fighting the urge to look at the wound that was soaking his robes and scarf. He couldn't feel his fingertips.

There was a thunder of feet on the stairs, and Tom appeared, followed by his house elf. Tom frowned and pulled Harry's scarf from the wound, "Splinched yourself?" He tutted, "Not too horrible. . . Could have been much worse if it had been your leg."

"Yeah, yeah," Harry snapped, watching Tom pull out a small vial of potion and let a few drops fall onto the wound, before drawing his wand and silently healing it.

"Dittany?" Harry asked, feeling the muscle reform and knit back together.

"Yes," Tom leaned in and sniffed his breath, and grimaced, "Was this an alcohol-related splinching?"

"I don't think so. I've barely been drinking," He slurred and paused, looking guilty, "That was caused by blood loss, not wine."

Tom raised a brow, his red eyes searching him, "Of course it was."

"You're beautiful." He said quickly, feeling a blush climb his cheeks. Yes, he was using it to distract Tom, but it was true.

He hadn't expected Tom to seem so surprised. The small parting of the lips, and the widening of his eyes, that one eyebrow-raising up further. His left eyebrow was much more expressive. It was adorable.

"I. . . I've been told." Tom said smiling before wrapping an arm around him, "Up we get."

"Did you ever watch television?" Harry asked, climbing to his feet and looking at where the wound was. He touched the fleshly healed flesh and relished the lack of pain. He still felt a bit light headed.

"I have seen bits and pieces of some when out with the muggles. Why?"
"Did you ever see Star Trek?"

Tom's face grew more and more perplexed, "Maybe. I am uncertain."

"Your one eyebrow goes up really high sometimes and it reminds me of the doctor. He only had one that went up high. Just like that!" Harry laughed, watching Tom's incredulous expression.

It was nearly into Tom's hairline at this point, "Ah. I feel that the blood loss may have affected you more than I thought." He guided Harry down a small set of stairs and into the kitchen. The house elf following behind wringing its hands.

Tom pulled out a stool and guided Harry into it before sitting in the one next to him, "Dapper, please fetch a blood replenishing potion and a glass of water." Tom looked at where the wound was, it was stained pink and streaks of red from the blood, "It'll be a bit lighter than the rest of your skin for a day or two, but it will even out. I hope you are not regretting coming here tonight."

Harry gingerly touched the regrown flesh, it was a bit tender but perfectly normal, "I don't. Even if someone ends up finding a piece of my arm outside the school."

"Some scavenger from the forest will probably find it and eat it."

Harry grimaced and nodded, "I can only hope."

The elf put the potion and glass of water in front of them, "Is there anything else master requires?"

"No, return to your duties," Tom said stiffly.

The elf popped away leaving them alone in the kitchen. Tom unscrewed the lid from the top of the potion and passed it to Harry, "Drink."

"Yes, sir." Harry winked and drank it down, grimacing at the taste, "I think I like it when you command me around."

Tom paused, looking like niffler caught in the cutlery drawer, before a slow smirk clawed its way onto his face, "Just wait until I am king. I'll be commanding everyone. Drink the water."

Harry licked his lips, and put a hand on Tom's knee, squeezing, "I think I will prefer it when we're alone, like this, and you're telling me what to do." His hand slid further up to Tom's thigh. His fingers spread out on tender inner flesh hidden under those dress robes.

Tom took a shuddering breath and fixed Harry with a steely look, "Drink the water before I force it down your throat."

Harry licked his lips and maintained eye contact and drained the glass, "As you command, my liege."

It was like a switch was flipped within Tom. Gone was the put together pureblood future king, and now there was a demon that was made of need and desire. He was lifted onto the counter, the potion vial and glass swept to the floor, shattering into pieces. His robes were violently ripped open, leaving him on the counter wearing his slacks and a blood-stained white dress shirt.

Tom was kissing him deeply, one hand on Harry's arse and the other on the back of his head, holding him in place. Tom pressed himself between Harry's legs, removing any space between them. Tom broke away and leaned into Harry's neck, sucking hard on his exposed flesh.
"I think you mean to take advantage of me," he moaned loudly as Tom licked up his neck and collarbone, "Your majesty."

Tom pulled him even closer, grinding their clothed erections together with a fervor that almost scared Harry. The sheer desire Tom displayed when he used those terms was divine.

"My liege," He grabbed Tom's robe, ripping it open, buttons flying throughout the kitchen and ricocheting off the dishes, "Have me."

He couldn't tell what Tom said since it was a visceral hiss, something that seemed to shoot a spark of arousal straight to his groin, but Harry could imagine it was something along the lines of, Gladly.

Their clothes were quickly divested of in a pile on the floor. Harry was seated on the marble counter with Tom pressed up between his legs, kissing him deeply, tenderly. One of his hands was entwined in Tom's hair and the other held both their shaft's stroking them in tandem.

Tom broke away from his lips, kissed his cheek, his neck, his collarbone, he traveled down Harry's body stopping to nip and suck on his nipple, before giving repeated pecks down his abdomen, stopping just before reaching the base of his cock.

Green eyes met red as Tom looked up at him through his fringe, his gaze was electric and almost silently he spoke in a hiss.

Harry needed to learn to at least understand parseltongue. Harry slowly licked his lips, attempting what he hoped was a sultry look, "My lord... please."

Tom slowly licked up Harry's shaft before engulfing him, and bobbing his head up and down, while tracing circles into Harry's thighs.

"Oh, my Lord." Harry threw his head back, and bucked the tiny bit he was capable of while on the counter, "Please... let me be of service to you." Harry adored that Tom was more than willing to go to his knees but Tom deserved the same or more.

Tom cocked his head to the side and stood up to his full height, his hand reaching around to cup Harry's cheek, "Be of service?" It was barely English, Harry doubted the man knew that he had lapsed so closely into parseltongue.

He slid off the counter, "I think you deserve to be worshipped, and what is better than someone on their knees?" Harry had grasped his shaft and began to stroke him while speaking.

Tom's eyes fluttered shut and a slight pink stained his pale cheeks. He didn't say anything but a stream of parseltongue flowed from between his lips and Harry dropped down into a kneeling position and held onto his hips before flicking his tongue onto the head of Tom's shaft.

"You know you're just making my ego worse," Tom whispered, his eyelids fluttering.

"Nothing wrong with having an ego as big as yours," he stroked Tom's sizable cock with a smirk, "The things you've done throughout your life... it validates having an ego that large."

Tom's eyes seemed to blaze at that and Harry took him into his mouth with a practiced ease. He felt a hand on the back of his head and Harry allowed Tom to control the pace as he bobbed his head along his length, taking him in deep. Tom clearly loved being in control and having willing supplicants before him and Harry was more than willing at the moment.

Harry hummed as he took Tom deeper down into his mouth, and slowly, in order to not gag, his
throat. Tom was girthy and it was difficult at times to breathe, but the look in his red eyes when Harry made eye contact with him. It was almost feral.

Tom tightened his grip on the back of Harry's head and began thrusting into him hard and deep. Harry frantically fisted his own cock, the darkness on the edges of his vision had returned the longer Tom stayed in his mouth but Harry felt his own orgasm approaching at a fervent pace the closer he drew to unconsciousness.

He stroked himself harder and faster as his vision faded completely. Tom still going relentlessly into his mouth. Harry came with a loud groan, spilling onto the floor. He felt the last strings of consciousness begin to slip when Tom pulled out of his mouth, allowing him to breathe.

He was being held up by his head, coughing for air when Tom came on his face and in his mouth as Harry sucked in deep lungfuls of air. The grip on his scalp was released and he fell forward onto Tom's legs.

"Oh my god." Harry choked out. That was one of the most intense and scary orgasms he had ever had.

Tom crouched down and lifted Harry so he was upright, and gently wrapped an arm around him. "I hope you are satisfied." He ran his hand through Harry's tangles and slid one of the fallen robes over Harry's shoulders, "I know I am."

Biting his lip, he smiled at Tom, even if his throat hurt it had been enjoyable, the look on Tom's face had been completely worth it, "That was bloody lovely. . . my Lord."

He helped Harry up to his feet, and slid one of the robes on, leaving them nude except for the robes, bare skin visible, "Don't start calling me that again unless you're not intent on walking for the next week."

"That sounds like a challenge—" Harry was cut off by Tom apparating them both to his study, "—enge."

He leveled him with an unimpressed look as he took in the sight of the office, "Did you really just do that?"

He received a cheeky grin, guided Harry into one of the plush chairs, "I didn't ask, due to a splinching related incident but, how are you?"

Considering the question, Tom was referring to his mental state and not his physical one. Harry chewed his bottom lip, "I'm getting used to the idea that there will be more deaths," he said quietly, "and that some of them might be people I know and like much more than Dumbledore. I know it's for the betterment off our society, I'm just not used to the thought of. . . death." He shrugged, avoiding eye contact with Tom, "You must think I'm soft."

Tom grabbed Harry's chin and pulled it to look at him. "Right now, yes, but you have seen the injustices of our world and you will be reborn through revolution." Tom's gaze was disturbingly intense.

The Dark Lord's tone and look were enthralling and Harry didn't know if there was a fire in his heart or his groin, but either way, Tom had just stoked the flames. Okay, it was not his groin, that wasn't going to be working for at least another ten to fifteen minutes, "You think so?"

"I do." Tom squeezed Harry's knee before sitting back into his chair and closing his eyes, almost looking like he was meditating.

Harry propped his head on his fist and drank in the sight; Tom's hair caught the shades of red that the
fire was throwing, red glinting off of black, his body that was barely clad in an open robe that allowed the eye to travel up, seeing beautifully toned calves, muscular thighs, a small crevasse of exposed flesh going all the way up allowing Harry to enjoy the view of Tom's abdomen. The way his arms were relaxed on the armrests and how his head tilted back, allowing Harry to trace the muscle up his neck. It was breathtaking. The way the fire threw the shadows onto him he looked like a modern Caravaggio.

Visceral, rich, beautiful. Disturbing.

Chiaroscuro incarnated.

How would they paint him in decades to come? A pioneer or a menace?

Harry prayed that Tom would be hailed as a visionary; to come as far as he had and fail. . .

It would be devastating.

He shook his head, trying to clear those thoughts from his mind. If anyone had the chance to succeed it was the man before him.

The older man stretched out and smiled lazily at Harry, "Has the school been treating you well? You haven't mentioned if you've received any grief for the Chamber of Secrets."

Harry shrugged, "My mum asked me on behalf of the teachers at one point but she knew I wouldn't show them. I think the board of governors might ask me but I think I will just defer action to you for it. Since it is your family heritage and all that, you might be able to come to the school and show it off to the board if you want to."

"Have you been back into the Chamber?"

Harry shook his head, "I haven't had the chance, I will go there and clean out any evidence of Tom Riddle though."

"Remove anything that might link the Gaunts to it as well. Being outed as a Gaunt would be worse than them finding out I was a half-blood." Tom commanded and pinched the bridge of his nose, "Sometimes I regret sharing that you discovered the Chamber with Skeeter."

Harry shrugged, "It was a clever way to give me a reputation. The first student to find it in a millennia. . . outside of the actual heir," his brows knitted together, "Just how did you find it?"

Tom snorted, "All I will say is that there was a lot of hissing involved, and let's leave it at that."

Harry laughed, imagining a young Tom going from room to room hissing at random objects. There was probably more to it but the mental image was a good one.

Harry curled his legs up underneath him, enjoying the softness of the robe which clearly wasn't his Hogwarts robe. It was softer than his black and green robe, smelled of cardamom and was a tad too long for him. He wondered if Tom would notice if he decided to knick it.

Probably.

Tom watched him through his lashes, a small smile on his lips, "Do you want something to drink? That's not alcoholic." He added, already knowing Harry's thought process.

"And here I was going to ask for a bottle of firewhiskey. Juice is fine."
Tom summoned his house elf, requesting a carafe of pumpkin juice and his own glass of wine.

"That is just mean," Harry eyed the glass that was given to Tom and begrudgingly worked on drinking the pumpkin juice. He had already drunk enough alcohol for the night and had the freshly created flesh to prove it.

"C'est la vie," Tom took a sip of his wine, watching Harry's pout the entire time, "As your soon to be King you must obey my word as law, and you were just referring to me as your liege."

"I also said oh my god, doesn't mean you are a god." Harry teased.

"I could be your god." Tom gave him a sultry look that shot another bolt of electricity straight down to Harry's groin.

"I . . I bet you could." He cursed himself for stuttering.

His laugh was melodic and beautiful, everything about him was beautiful but sometimes Harry remembered the painting and wondered if it was an act.

Speaking of the painting . . .

"I saw in the Prophet that you are getting your own chocolate frog card."

Tom rolled his eyes, "They sent me a prototype and the caveat that it would only go into production if I became king."

"I wouldn't be surprised if they already had some printed up and ready to stuff in the boxes for February 3rd."

"It would be wise. Even if I lost they wouldn't be out much except a few sheets of cardboard and ink."

"Can I see it?"

Tom raised a brow and rose, Harry's robe brushing against the back of Tom's knees as he retrieved the card from his desk and passed it to Harry, "I didn't think you collected them."

Harry flushed brightly, "Everyone collects one or two if you think they're rare." It was a good likeness, capturing Tom's red eyes and high cheekbones, the Tom within raised an imperious brow at him before returning to his previous position, "I wonder if they'll make yours one of the hard to get ones. Dumbledore cards are more common than muck."

Tom shrugged, "It would be amusing to see people vying for my card, but I do not know. Keep it if you like. A prototype would probably fetch a better price anyways."

Harry blinked and held it close to his chest, "Really? I can have it?"

Tom nodded, "I have no use of it."

Harry got up from his chair and walked to Tom, straddling him and giving him a lingering kiss before sliding the card into the inner pocket of his robes.

Tom looked down, seemingly realizing for the first time that he was not, in fact, wearing his own robe, "Morgana's tits. . . I haven't worn one of these decades." He chuckled, looking at the green lining, "I make these robes look good."
"Is this what happens when someone inflates your ego?" Harry whispered and kissed Tom's neck, "Though it is true, you look delicious."

"People generally taste good if properly cooked and with good seasoning." Harry wasn't sure if it was his wide-eyed reaction or the complete silence that descended, to the point he was pretty sure his heart stopped, but Tom quickly added, "Or so I've heard."

Harry raised his hands in the air, "I'm not going to ask further." Now was not the time to find out just how often someone might have dined on longpig. If it was once that was alright, maybe for a magic experiment, maybe they were dead, but if it was more than once and maybe even current... well, that might just throw some wrenches into their relationship.

Tom nodded, biting his lip and looked away awkwardly, "That might be for the best. I never found out, why was your father at the Hog's Head?"

Harry was almost tempted to go back to the cannibalism conversation at the mention of his father, "Ugh, apparently Crouch was being snippy with him and he needed to drink it off with Sirius... my mum gave me the breakdown of what happened."

"Is this irregular for Crouch?"

"I doubt it. Mum wasn't very clear. She didn't want to talk about it other than dad was worried that he wouldn't have a job."

"But he still does, correct?"

Harry nodded, "He's on unpaid suspension," he sighed, "He sent me a letter the other day. I haven't responded to it."

"Oh?"

"It's in the pocket," Harry paused, cursing himself for sharing this, he didn't know if he really wanted to, "If you want to look. Don't feel like you have to."

Tom reached in and pulled out the sheaf of parchment and read it.

Harry watched his expression. It barely changed except for a faint sneer curling on his lip. That was much how Harry had read it, hidden away in an alcove after breakfast. His mother having noticed that his father's owl delivering him a message. He refused to share his correspondence with her in this case.

After a minute it was handed back to him, "What do you think of it?"

Harry looked at the slightly crumpled parchment, and read it again.

Dear Harry,

I am sending you this letter since we always seem to devolve into arguing when we see each other in person. This may seem like the coward's way out but I need you to know that I am sorry. I have been a subpar father. I have heaped expectations on you since you were little. I expected that you would be in Gryffindor, a star quidditch player, surrounded by loud rambunctious friends.

I expected you to be me.

I forgot that you are your own person. I didn't think that you may go down a different path then I
did. I didn't think that you might be as studious as you are, as ambitious, clever or even secretive. I didn't think that you would be a Slytherin. I will admit I also scorned them when I was younger, considered them dark and malicious but I never thought of myself that way. When I was in school I could be exceptionally cruel, more than willing to use dark magic, but I thought it was fine because it was me, because the evil Slytherins deserved to be punished.

Sometimes I think that I must have been a psychopath then.

When you were sorted into Slytherin it threw my entire world off balance and that is not your fault. I know you know it's not your fault, you know it's my issue but I made it your issue and I am sorry for that.

I am sorry I pulled away from you.

I am sorry I let you down.

I am sorry that I failed you as your father.

Instead of growing close during your Hogwarts years; you sending me letters asking for advice, us training for quidditch over the holidays, talking about pranks to orchestrate... we drifted apart and I caused that. I will never forgive myself for causing this distance.

I only thought about myself, I didn't consider your feelings. I am an adult and I should have known better.

I fear that my actions potentially made you more willing to seek solace with Lord Slytherin. You know me well enough to know I do not agree with him or his politics. That he works with monsters. I don't want you to get hurt, but I know I can't turn you from your path. You have made your choice, but please, please, always know that you can always come back home. You are always welcome and I will always love you.

-Your loving father

"He's trying to make amends," Harry folded it. "Why? What's your interpretation?"

Tom tapped his fingers on the armrest, "He's come to terms that you are with me, but still wishes for you to return to the right side. He knows that you will very likely be in opposition of him in the future," Harry nodded, this had crossed his mind, "I will say that this letter isn't about you, it's about his guilt. If it was about you he would be trying to make amends. To see your side. He is acknowledging that, for now, you are the enemy, but he will forgive you when you see the light. He refuses to see your point of view, that maybe you have valid concerns about things. He is still the noble Gryffindor, ready to forgive the devious Slytherin because that's what good people do." Tom scoffed, "Even if you did end up returning to them they wouldn't let you be, they would milk you for information."

Harry sighed, "You think I should keep him at arm's reach?"

"It's up to you what you wish to do about your father Harry. I cannot reveal my whole plan to your family, they would oppose any outcome that ends in bloodshed, and this will end in bloodshed. We will forge our society anew in flames and blood."

"Thank you," Harry whispered and put the paper in the robe pocket. It hurt that he couldn't trust his father, but then, he hadn't trusted James since he had been sorted into Slytherin.
Meanwhile at Malfoy Manor . . .

"The Dark Lord suggested that I teach transfiguration?!!" Narcissa said in a tone that both scared and aroused Lucius.

"He just mentioned that the Black family has a talent for transfiguration. I swear I will find someone else!" He said placatingly, taking and holding her arms.

Narcissa gave him a look that promised him pain if he failed to do so, "You better."

Chapter End Notes

I dedicate this chapter to Eris/PhoenixRisingDusk who is awesome and asked for me to dedicate the chapter to her.
Thanks a million Angelof Mysteries for betaing my comma and apostrophe abuse.
i just wanted to thank you all for your comments, they give me life.
Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

AN: I dedicate this chapter to nanimok who has been scaring me with threats of vore and is kind enough to word sprint with me late into the night and to Rae, my lovely beta, who tolerates my commas and my asides.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Tuesday, January 20th

The chocolate frog card sat unmoving on the desk. It was mocking him.

No, mocking would have been good; the chocolate frog card sat on the desk *not* mocking him, the lack of mocking was irritating him to no end. It *would* scoff at him every now and then, but that was not what he needed it to do.

And with it being the only copy of the frog card in existence, currently, he *could not* fuck it up.

His page of hastily written notes sat open next to him. The painted version of Tom had gone over it in detail with him, making him memorize the steps and incantations, but something just seemed to go wrong every time he tried to cast the spell.

Tom looked up at him and scoffed before turning away and becoming a still portrait.

"Prick," Harry muttered under his breath and jabbed his wand at the picture and said the incantation, focusing his energy on linking the damn painting to the card. He waited for the condescending jab at his intelligence or the ungrateful comment about time, but nothing happened.

Again.

Harry swore.

The painting had told him that the somnus paper could potentially block the link the two portraits would share if it was wrapped too tightly around the canvas at Riddle manor, but it wasn't like Harry would have been able to do anything about that in any case. The painting refused to tell him where the safe was or the combination. It would have been up to the painting to figure something out.

And he had thought the hard part would have been *getting* the card.

Guilt coiled in his stomach, twisting through him like a writhing serpent. Tom had given it to him out of kindness, but now he would be using it in secret to communicate with a different version of Tom. A part of Tom that was rather homicidal and had attempted to kill him.

For the millionth time, he wondered if this was the best course of action, but shoved the thought to the back of his mind where it could be more easily ignored. Funny how many things were now in that dark corner of his mind.

Lifting the card from the desk, he rested it gently on the side table that the room of requirement had provided him, scoured the desk clean of the chalked-in runes, and splashed it with spring water to
cleansed it of any latent magic that remained.

Taking the mortar and pestle, he dropped the charcoal in and ground it up, his mind going blank as it broke down into smaller and smaller pieces, then finally, powder. He took his wand, made a small incision on his arm and let a few drops fall into the mortar. He muttered a quick *episkey* and healed his arm before mixing the blood into the charcoal while chanting the incantation that the painting had drilled into his head.

He prayed that this wouldn't bind him to the damned menace in some horrible way.

A book he had, that Regulus had been kind enough to send over, did say that a small sacrifice of blood was required to give a more advanced sentience to a painting; even if there was already an intelligent painting to connect it to, both needed the small sacrifice of *life* to function.

The last few days had been tense; the death of Dumbledore had shaken him more than he would have liked to admit and sneaking out of the castle the day of Dumbledore's funeral *and* the day after had been a risky move, but one he felt comfortable in doing. If only he hadn't *splinched* himself when going to Tom's home. At least he hadn't done so when going to Knockturn Alley. He probably would have been dragged to Saint Mungo's and his parents would have been called and there would have been oh-so-many questions.

A tap of his wand to the mortar, and the charcoal paste formed into a hardened stick. Harry pressed it against the desk and began to inscribe the runes. Harry focused his thoughts on how he wished for the spell to work, for the painting to learn not to hate him, for him and the painting to work together to protect Tom from any external and *internal* threats.

He finished with the final rune, *sowilo*, and finished the circle, sealing the magic in its circuit. The frog card was placed in the centre. He flicked his wand and said "*Vivus,*" before sitting back and watching the magic he had infused into the circle flow into the card. If he could complete the next part it would have a greater amount of sentience, but he didn't want that. He needed to link it to the painting within Riddle manor.

Harry pulled a solitary strand of hair from the envelope on the side table. He had managed to snag a few from Tom's hairbrush when he had used his bathroom after their *festivities*, but if he continued to flub the spell he would be in trouble. He doubted he would be able to steal more of Tom's hair.

The strand was dropped onto the centre of the portrait. He waved his wand in a sideways figure eight motion, "*Nexius!*" Harry watched with bated breath, praying the spell took. The strand of hair remained firmly resting on the card instead of being absorbed by it.

"Fuck. You." He snapped and pushed away from the desk with a heavy sigh.

He would have to wait for the energy within the circle to dissipate before he could attempt again. He grabbed the book and flipped it open to the ritual page, *again*.

There were only three strands of hair left, and he was uncertain about attempting to steal more from Tom. If he ever found out that Harry had taken some of his hair . . . it would not be good. He knew that Tom cared for him, but being caught with bits of his hair? That's just one step below having his blood. A single strand of hair in the wrong hands could do so much damage, either through curses upon his being or if they used polyjuice to take his appearance they could ruin his reputation.

Harry hoped that his hands weren't the wrong hands.

It was nearly two in the morning, but he was still locked away attempting, for the seventh time, to
link the two portraits. There was no one he could ask, outside of attempting to send a message to a portrait painter, but knowing his luck it would be the one Tom had commissioned for the portrait.

Harry pinched the bridge of his nose and rested his head against the back of the chair. He felt a headache forming.

He drifted into an uneasy sleep, and the stone walls of Hogwarts fell away into a heavy white mist that surrounded him and prevented him from seeing or hearing anything around him. There was a barely discernible echo and Harry pressed towards it, forward through the fog. His foot caught on the rough ground as he attempted to navigate towards the echo.

There was a scream nearby and in attempting to turn and look for the source, he fell, his knees hitting the ground with a heavy thud.

Panic wrapped around his throat, restricting his airway as he felt the ground, only able to feel with his hands. His fingers were wet and pressed into the something that felt disturbingly flesh like. The softness of flesh combined with the hardness of bone beneath, he felt around slowly, exploring the area and cursing the fog.

He sniffed the air, it did not smell of moisture, but of ash and smoke.

How had he mistaken it? Harry dropped to his stomach, below the smoke and came face to face with the dead staring eyes of-

"POTTER!"

Harry lunged forward, the dream flying away into the aether of his mind. He stared blankly at his hand, remembering nothing except the feeling of flesh under his fingertips.

"Are you done with your theatrics?" Came a scathing tone from the desk.

He blinked, staring down at the at the piece of cardboard that glared back up at him. "It worked," he said breathlessly.

"It certainly took you long enough."

Less than a minute and Harry was already contemplating lighting him on fire, "You're welcome. Are you enjoying life on the outside?" He asked pleasantly.

"You're a petulant brat that is unworthy of licking my boots, let alone touching my counterpart. You should feel privileged to be learning from me."

Maybe he would pull a Tom and lock the painting away, perhaps stuffed in a pair of thick wool socks to muffle the yelling. "The only thing I've learned from you is how obnoxious you can be," Harry paused, considering it. "And the painting ritual, but mainly the former."

He wondered how the painting could do something as mundane as rolling its eyes, but there it went, looking exasperated, "You ungrateful pissant."

"So tell me, Tom, what our next step is?"

"Don't!" It snapped, slashing a hand, "Do not call me that!"

Harry raised a brow, "And why not? It is your name."

The painting glowered and said nothing. Oh, how he looked like a petulant child.
Harry picked the card up, propped it on the side table and began to scrub the desk clean, "And if I can't call you Tom, what shall I call you? I can call you dickhead, but that's rather insulting to Tom. Maybe we should refrain from hurling insults, we are supposed to be working together after all." If he wanted to play the silent game Harry was down with that. He could wait him out while filling the air with chatter. Would probably drive the painting to light itself on fire.

Hopefully.

One *scourgify* of the charcoal, a splash of spring water, and the desk was cleaned of any remnant magic.

"So, I was researching Avery a bit but there really isn't a lot about him. There was a mention of a marriage announcement in the Prophet, but not much else. Care to tell me more?" Harry watched the painting from the corner of his eye as he packed away the remaining ritual materials. It was the closest to a pout he would probably ever see on him.

"Avery's father was of minor note. A useless member of the Sacred 27 that would only vote in line with the bigger families like Malfoy or Black."

Harry nodded, those were not families you wanted on your bad side. There were families that were firmly entrenched in their ideals, but there were a few that would waver between liberal and traditional values. The Selwyn, Burke, MacMillan, Shafiq, Crouch, Greengrass, and Slughorn families were the ones that would sway the votes one way or the other. They were the ones that people would focus on influencing when there was to be a Conclave. Harry wondered what Tom's margins were for the upcoming vote. The issue of kingship was polarizing, to say the least.

"Augustus desired his father's seat and arranged for his death so he could claim the seat, which he took three months after graduat-"

"Did you kill him?" Harry interjected.

"Does it matter?"

"Maybe."

The painting pursed his lips, "Yes. I was responsible for his death."

"Does Avery hold it against you?"

"No. He holds no remorse for things like that. It was all part of the plan." The painting was pacing within the small frame the frog card allowed. "Have you read any occlumency books?"

Harry allowed the change of subject, Avery was a sore spot, "One. I started to visualize my mindscape."

"Let me guess, it's Hogwarts or your home." The painting stated his expression blank.

"The book said that buildings or mazes were preferred but I went with a bit more of an open concept. Want to check it out sometime?" Harry responded cheekily.

The painting raised a sculpted brow but did not ask, "Keep at it. I will visit you one night and test your defences."

Harry nodded and decided it was his turn to change the subject, "Dumbledore died. Did you manage to overhear that in your vault?"
He extracted a newspaper from his bag and held it up for the painting. The headline read ALBUS DUMBLEDORE MURDERED? AUROR SPECULATES AT FOUL PLAY

The painting tapped his chin and crossed his arms, "Skeeter?"

"Yes."

"Read it to me."

With a sigh, Harry began, "We are in a time of mourning for the passing of the ancient and venerated headmaster Albus Dumbledore. Just last week he died after a short illness, believed to be a strengthened version of the muggle flu, but our mourning has since turned into questioning.

During the headmaster's funeral, Auror couple Alice and Frank Longbottom expressed concern that it was not, in fact, an illness but murder!

This news certainly surprised me, as Dumbledore was over one hundred and fifty years old and likely had one foot in the grave as it was when he contracted his illness, but I was intrigued by their outrageous claims.

So, why have the two Aurors speculated this to such venerated individuals as Madame Maxine of Beauxbatons, and fellow member of the Sacred 27, Horace Slughorn?

I loathe to say this but as employees of the ministry, have they been encouraged to spread vicious rumours in an attempt to undermine certain individuals? They both spoke their suspicions regarding a certain high standing member of our society; I believe you will be able to determine who it is. I have not been permitted to print their name as our editors do not wish to face a defamation lawsuit.

Could this be a ministry coup against the Sacred 27 or a more personal one? Bartemius Crouch Sr. has long held a vitriolic dislike for the nobility of Britain while also being a member himself. Is he attempting to undermine the bond between the ministry and the Sacred 27? Have the Longbottoms been ordered to spread rumours by their employer?

A shocking thought to say the least.

Recently, James Potter, father of Harry Potter, Lord Slytherin's paramour, was put on suspension for refusing to provide Lord Crouch with information regarding his son and Lord Slytherin's relationship which is worrisome for the integrity of the Ministry.

We at the Daily Prophet are concerned and appalled that the head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement believes he has the right to interrogate his employees about private and personal information? And then to punish them for refusing to divulge that information using his higher standing over them?

I fear it might be time for a new department head at the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, as it clearly cannot be Lord Crouch or any of his sycophan—"

The painting lifted a hand, cutting Harry off. "Enough. Skeeter is on one of her smear campaigns, that much is nothing unusual. I wonder if anyone put her up to it."

"Skeeter being absent from the funeral is definitely a cause of concern, but not the only one," Harry said, leaning forward his hands clasped together and his elbows on his knees, "The Prophet sent some male reporter instead, they were probably asked to in order to avoid controversy during the funeral, but absolutely everyone will be aware that something is wrong if Skeeter isn't present at a high-profile wizard's funeral and the reporter they had sent would probably not share that bombshell
with her. Hell, I don't think I saw him speak to them while I was there."

The painting shrugged, nonplussed. "And the other cause of concern?"

"The necessity of Crouch's death."

The painting looked intrigued. "How so?"

"I've looked at all the votes required and Tom would have enough to be made king even without Crouch's vote. The people that are suspicious of Dumbledore being assassinated will become more so if one of the biggest opposition to Tom's coronation turns up dead a few weeks after Dumbledore did. By my numbers, Tom would win nineteen to eight. It would just be Abbott, Fawley, Longbottom, Ollivander, Prewett, Shacklebolt, Weasley and Crouch voting agains—"

He was cut off by an insidious chuckle from the painting, "You think that only eight would oppose?"

His red eyes pierced Harry to the core, "Without Crouch's vote we would win by a margin of one."

"One!? That—that's preposterous! The majority of the Sacred 27 fall right in line with his ideology!"

"Just because they have the same beliefs does not mean they want a king. They are comfortable being the ruling class and prefer their creature comforts to having a monarch that might influence their lives. Burke would have voted our way, but that incompetent man sold his vote a while back."

Harry frowned, "Regulus did mention something along those lines. Who are the others that would oppose it?"

"Slughorn will vote against it, Dumbledore probably persuaded him against voting for my counterpart, Greengrass and Shafiq are concerned about their businesses, Parkinson felt the same initially too. MacMillan will oppose a monarchy out of spite."

Harry pursed his lips, "Shafiq and Greengrass are surprising... I go to school with Ernie MacMillan and he has acted excited about having a King," he tapped his leg, "I should have taken Slughorn's friendship with Dumbledore into account."

"Yes, you should have. I thought you would be smart enough to realize there are business interests and old loyalties that can cause issues."

"Don't make me light you on fire." Harry threatened.

"It was uncertain where Black's loyalties lie. He had been a wild card for months, evading and refusing to give a direct answer, but once you... became involved with my counterpart he agreed to vote with us."

Harry was not surprised; Regulus had seemed skittish on the subject. He would have put Regulus down as a yes on the vote anyway, but a soft yes. "Speaking of Regulus, I sent him a letter asking if his father ever documented anything about his fellow Slytherins... business documents and the like."

The painting looked at him like he was stupid, "Of course he did. What kind of person would he have been if he didn't use the networking he built during his time at Hogwa—" he stopped and pinned Harry with a dark look, "Why did you send him a letter?"

Harry shifted uncomfortably in his seat, "...I'm trying to find out more about Flint, Nott and Avery."
The painting stared at him for a solid minute, his lips in a pursed line, his jaw clenched, before speaking, each word was carefully enunciated, "Please tell me that you didn't mention any of their names."

Harry saw the painting's eye twitch, "I didn't, but how am I supposed to research him if I can't look for sources?"

"If he hears that anyone is looking into him, your life may be forfeit." He hissed, his voice barely human.

Harry pursed his lips, "Your concern is touching, but I think I will be able to handle myself."

"The folly of youth. You are not untouchable, Potter. Be careful."

"I will. I know you'd prefer not to find someone else to boss around. Imagine if you had to put up with Bellatrix. I can't tell if she would burn or worship you."

The painting pinched the bridge of his nose, "Do shut up. I know you see yourself as some clever Slytherin, but Avery has years of experience in this field. He will win if we don't work together."

Harry stopped himself from making a sarcastic remark given how earnest he sounded in that moment, "Fine, I'll be more careful."

The last few days have not been good, as you know. I had thought at most it would be mildly stressful given the issue of the MacLachlan time-turner investigation and the theft of whalebone that was to be used for rune work, but I should have known the day would go poorly when Alice woke up with a migraine.

It seems odd, as there is no evidence of anyone having the sight in her family, but I would say 90% of the time, if she develops a migraine, we are going to have a bad day.

I thought maybe it had been the weather that had caused it. The fog and humidity causing her a rousing headache. She opted to stay at home as she would not be able to work at all while blinded by the pain.

I am grateful for that. Had she gone to work today it may have been her and not me and I cannot bear the thought.

I made my way through the thick London fog to the Ministry. Even though the walk was short, my robe was drenched with condensation. It seems like a little thing, but I was fond of that robe; it was bespelled wool that my mother had purchased for me once I finished my Auror training. Many protections had been weaved into it, but she had seemingly forgotten to make it waterproof.

Alice finds it amusing that my mother would think to protect me from curses but not the common cold.

So, I arrived at the DMLE in a foul mood. Alice being sick, my being wet, and seeing the Prophet once again singing the praises of Lord Slytherin had made for a tiresome morning. And then Lord Crouch decided that I should take on Alice’s responsibilities for the day. I do not envy her job; she may have a higher status and better pay, but there is no amount of money you could pay me to be Crouch’s second in command.

Potter and Tonks agreed to work on what they could from my workload, which gave me some relief. I fear they will have to do so for the next few weeks given my state, but they can handle it.
I briefed Crouch on the open cases, the ones that were closing and going onto the judicial stage, and, disturbingly, some information he had received regarding Lord Slytherin. I do not care for Slytherin. He caters to the lowest of the low with blood-purist ideals and the derision of muggles, but for Crouch to be using DMLE resources to gather information about a private citizen is a criminal act. That is something that falls into the purview of the Unspeakables, not that they would admit it.

We went over his schedule; he had a meeting with the Minister from nine through to eleven, a small break from eleven to noon where he would use the time to do paperwork, twelve-thirty to two-thirty was his bi-weekly visit to Pemberton’s, followed by an hour block of employee reviews and then finishing off the day with a meeting with all department employees.

It seemed simple enough.

I was able to use the two hour time frame while he was with the Minister to work on the MacLachlan time-turner incident— which honestly shouldn’t even be ours, it happened in America for Merlin’s sake— after which I helped Lord Crouch with his paperwork which was a tedious process as it needed to be exact.

Oddly enough, he invited me to go to Pemberton’s with him. I am not a fan of the club as it tends to exacerbate the divide between classes, but I wouldn’t say anything to Lord Crouch about my beliefs on the matter as I was afraid he might find it insulting if I had implied that he was a hypocrite.

Not that I would.

To his face.

I did end up going with him to the club, which was not an issue since my grandfather had put me on the register two days after I was born. The fog had lifted but it had begun to rain heavily, the clouds a bruised looking blue-black, threatening anyone outside with a thunderstorm.

We were ignored for the most part on our way there. I had truly forgotten how far set back it was from the main section of Diagon Alley. Going there had sent me through the pensieve, remembering my grandfather and father taking me there for the first time when I was eight. I had not been a fan of the tobacco smoke but the food, ah, the food I had been fond of. I have yet to experience a smoked eel like I have at Pemberton’s.

There had been a few people who had stopped and looked at Lord Crouch as he made his way through the Alley, one haggard woman even yelling at him for suspending James. I assume she reads Skeeter’s articles, the drivel that they are. There was also a man there. I should have recognized him even though his face was shrouded, the scar that travelled down the middle of his face should have set off a few warning bells, but Crouch and I ignored him. Aurors get strange looks all the time.

Once we reached Pembertons, Crouch excused himself and went to one of the private dining rooms to meet with some different members. I recognized Lords Slughorn, Burke, and Bulstrode waiting for him. The only conceivable thing they all had in common was Conclave, and someone had clearly called the meeting in an attempt to sway the votes. The only two I could perceive doing so are Bulstrode and Crouch, and it is much more likely that it was Crouch who arranged it.

He truly detests Slytherin.

So, much to my annoyance, I was left to eat lunch, read newspapers and magazines for the better part of an hour while listening to them have an obfuscated row behind the doors. Bulstrode and Burke stormed out together, leaving Slughorn to follow at a more sedate pace, but still fleeing Lord
Crouch.

His face was puce, and a vein bulged on his forehead, but I had seen him this angry before. I had been seeing him this angry since Lord Slytherin appeared on the political scene.

Crouch didn't seem to notice or remember that he had brought me with him as he made his way out of the club and into the streets. I was not too far behind him as I followed him while dawning my outer-robe.

It's funny but I remember thinking about how the employee reviews were all going to be bad because of Crouch's mood, that no one would survive unscathed.

If only.

It happened in a flash. The hooded, scarred man I had seen earlier, his hood was down now, and I saw his face. Trenton Spriggs; wanted for using the Unforgivables on a family of muggles. Crouch had recognized him and drawn his wand. Spriggs had done much the same.

It was only the three of us in the alleyway, the two of them focused on each other, neither of them paying me any mind. I drew my own wand and slowly approached, hoping to blend in with the buildings. It didn't work, but the two of them only had eyes for each other.

Crouch's face was cold and expressionless as he told Spriggs to drop his wand, but Spriggs looked like a demon possessed, his face twisted into a hideous visage of rage, his mouth a ragged wound that was a smile and his eyes... his eyes were alight with cruelty and joy.

In my years as an Auror I had met men like this but for a few times, the majority of people we see are just normal people that finally snapped, but this man was psychotic. Right then, in that moment, was what he wanted. He wanted to kill.

Crouch was the first to cast; a series of stunners, followed by tripping hexes.

Trenton deflected them away with ease and rushed in towards Crouch, his wand in one hand and a previously unseen knife in the other. It was that moment I had chosen to act, I grabbed Crouch's collar and pulled him away from the deranged man.

That action attracted Spriggs attention and the curse that was meant for Crouch hit me instead.

All I remember from that point was blinding pain and a sense of weightlessness. I don't remember Crouch cursing Spriggs, nor do I remember Spriggs killing Crouch. I do recall turning my head at one point and seeing him lying on the ground, unmoving. Unresponsive. Unalive.

But that was it.

The next thing I saw was Alice with tears in her eyes. She told I had been unconscious for the past three days in Saint Mungo's and that the DMLE was in chaos, but that none of it mattered now that I was awake.

It took me awhile to realize what was wrong. The pain-relief potions they have at Saint Mungo's are top tier, so much so that I didn't notice that I was missing my left arm. The cutting curse had hit my shoulder, cutting into collarbone. She said that if a medi-witch had not been the first person to find me I would have died.

I am still shocked I didn't.
None of the staff at the hospital recognized the curse that had hit me and resorted to the muggle technique of cauterizing the wound, thankfully I was unconscious for the procedure.

I fear that I have been overly verbose, I believe it is the potions they have me on, but I hope my statement will be helpful.

-Frank Longbottom

James put the letter down and held his head in his hands.

It wasn't helpful.

Nothing was going right.

His friend was maimed, and the world was going to hell in a handbasket. Accusations of leaks, of fear-mongering by ministry employees, people suspicious of him, suspicious of Dumbledore's death, angry and shocked by the seemingly random death of the head of the DMLE.

The pictures they had taken sat in front of him, visceral and red. The spot where Frank had laid, bleeding out on the cobbles, Crouch's body still there, unmoving, unliving, uncaring of the chaos he had caused with his death.

The other pictures were of Trenton Spriggs. His body cold and dead, blood staining his robes. He had used his wand to cut his arms open and had bled out in an abandoned farmstead outside Edinburgh. A pair of muggle teenagers had found the body yesterday, thankfully the snow had preserved him. Kingsley was transporting the body via ministry car and was still a few hours out.

It seemed so neat, so clean. It fit a narrative too well; criminal sees the head of DMLE and an Auror, draws his wand in a panic, kills one, maims the other, flees the scene of the crime and kills himself knowing that he would face being kissed.

Frank and Alice had mentioned that they thought the timing of Dumbledore's death was suspicious but in James' bones, he knew this was wrong. It set his teeth on edge with the wrongness of it all. It was too perfect and it benefitted Slytherin too much.

But there was no evidence. The case was already in the process of being closed despite them not even examining the body. Trenton Spriggs was no hired assassin from what anyone had to say. Amelia, for her usual diligence, was already pushing for this to be swept away, hidden like some unwanted, whore bred child.

Fudge was probably responsible for urging the case be closed. Crouch wasn't beloved, he had been irrational as of late, and even the Sacred 27 seemed to dislike him. Why look harder when there was already a dead criminal to blame it all on?

He could think of many reasons for Crouch to be killed; promotion for some, a ministry scandal that he hadn't heard of, inheritance, revenge. . . James was worried that someone would accuse him of being behind it, for being upset about Crouch's accusations towards him.

He was startled from his thoughts by a knock on his door, he didn't have a chance to respond before it opened in Amelia Bones stepped in. "James, we need to talk," she said closing the door with a click. He watched as she locked it manually, spelled it shut and put a series of wards around the room, sealing them in.

He didn't get up, he didn't smile or greet her in any professional, brown-nosing manner, he merely nodded and straightened the papers on his desk.
Amelia sat down on the chair across from him, the serious look on her face fading into one of concern, "How are you?" she asked, her voice soft.

"I'll be fine," he responded tersely and sat up straight. "I take it you're the new head of the DMLE?" He knew that she was being pressured to but it didn't stop him from feeling resentful.

"I am."

He took off his glasses and wiped the lenses on the hem of his robe, "Am I in trouble?"

"No," he started to breathe a sigh of relief, "but you are getting a position change."

"Oh? Am I? Why? To what?" He tried to act nonchalant about it but his heart was racing. Was he going to end up in Magical Maintenance or Misuse of Muggle Artifacts?

Amelia tapped her fingers on his desk, "I'm promoting you to the position of Unspeakable."

James stared blankly at her, "Wait, what? I think I misheard you because it sounded like you said that I'm going to be an Unspeakable."

"I have a special assignment for you and it wouldn't be... proper if you were to remain working as an Auror while doing it."

His breath caught in his throat as he realized the implications. The Unspeakables acted as a research division for some unknown or unacknowledged magic but there were a few that did other things, things that were unscrupulous and not exactly legal. Like spying on private citizens, "Oh?" He said, his voice cracking and going several octaves higher. Merlin, he sounded like he was twelve again.

She reached across the desk and put her hand on top of the photos, "I need you to determine if this was an assassination." She tapped Crouch's file, "You will still be an Auror, but we're going to put you on a limited duty to allow you time to research this."

"What about Dumbledore's death?"

"Him too."

"You want to know if Slytherin is behind this." He said. It was a statement, not a question.

"Him or the people behind the scenes. Slytherin is a pretty boy figurehead, I want the people who have gotten him to this point."

"Malfoy is always with him--"

Amelia lifted a hand, silencing him, "Malfoy provides money, not brains. Crouch has... had been adamantly against Lord Slytherin. He was a threat to Slytherin taking the throne peacefully and as we saw from Frank's letter, Crouch was trying to influence Conclaves votes."

"Do we know which way his son will vote?"

"I am uncertain, I don't know if he will be sworn in in time for him to vote tomorrow," she sighed, "There's nothing we can do now to stop the vote, but if you are able to uncover the truth... there will be hope."

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February 1st, Eglinton Hall
He stood swathed in shadows, hidden away on an overlooking balcony, silently watching the ceremony below. It was a simple thing really, the signing of a ledger, the passing of a mantle from father to son, but it was a solemn occasion, marked by mournful expressions and the crying of a widow.

Crouch signed his name, and a senior member of the Sacred 27, Flint, in this case, initialled next to it, swearing Barty in as the representative of the Crouch bloodline. He shook Flint's hand and before turning to his mother and holding her close, allowing her to sob into his robes.

It was an overdramatic display for his taste. Crouch Senior had been a menace to both light and dark and now that he was out of the way there would be less concern. The woman should be happy to be free of the arrogant fool.

A staccato tapping of a cane drew his attention away from the scene below. Tom remained in place but turned to look at the intruder. White hair, white eyes, and a cold white smile only met one thing.

Avery.

The man drew up alongside him and stopped, his unseeing eyes focused on Barty Crouch. "Eglington Hall is only for members of Conclave and their family. If anyone were to see you... that would be most unfortunate."

"How fortunate that the only person that has perceived me happens to be blind," Tom sniped and raised a silencing ward around them.

Avery raised a hand up and touched the spot where the ward separated them, "You are not king yet, Tom. Do try to remember that."

"Only one day more."

"Indeed. The attack on Crouch has had an unintended, but beneficial, side effect." Avery said softly.

"The Longbottom's will not be able to vote," Tom answered.

Avery dropped his hand from the ward, "Young Barty did well."

"And he shall be rewarded for it."

They stood in silence, Tom watching Crouch shake hands with the members of the Sacred 27 that were present.

Avery said nothing. It was one of his favoured tactics, to be silent and let others fill the air with chatter where he could find nuggets of information, to pick up bits and pieces and file them away to use at a later date or to connect it to something else he knew and exchange the information for a favour. He had already mastered it by the time he had entered Hogwarts.

It was Avery's quiet nature that had led to Tom sitting near Avery at meals and in the library during his first few years at Hogwarts. If he had hated Tom, he didn't say anything and Tom hadn't said anything back in return. If he had held any prejudices against Tom for his perceived blood-status, Avery had not said anything. Open ears and closed lips, it was a policy that had worked for Avery, worked too well in some cases.

Tom silently cursed his younger self for not being secretive enough, he had loved to boast of the magic he had mastered, of the experiments that were successes. If only he hadn't mentioned Horcruxes. Alas, the past was the past, it wasn't like there was a time-turner that could
take him back to stop himself from being a self-aggrandizing little shit.

"Is your paramour recovering from his injury?" Avery asked, breaking the silence.

Even though Avery couldn't see, Tom gave a smile that was more of a grimace than anything else. It was a power play, an effective one at that, reminding Tom that Avery was in control, that he knew what was happening in Tom's house and in his life. That every part of his fabricated history was created by Avery, that all of Thomas "Slytherin's" wealth was funded by Avery and the other two. That the life he had built was supported only by Avery's skill, network and resources. That he was, at this moment in time, only a figurehead for a powerful triumvirate behind him.

By Morgana, that would not be the case for much longer. If only he had lived in a world where intellect and magical might would make him revered as a leader, instead of having to play at being royalty.

"He is well. It was a minor incident that was easily healed." Tom replied, nonchalantly.

"I am pleased to hear that. He is a bright boy. I am looking forward to seeing what he will bring to our cause." Tom watched from the corner of his eye as Avery cocked his head, a small smile on Avery's face, "With his talent for information trading, I was thinking it might be worth taking him under my wing once he graduates. Help him hone his skills."

He felt the urge to fidget with the hem of his robes but quashed it, any sound would let Avery know that he may be unsettled by the thought, "It is an opportunity he should take if you offer it to him. You are a master of your craft and he would be a fool to decline." Tom replied while vowing that there was no way in Hell that he would allow it.

"Delightful. I hope you tell him good things about me." Avery said before leaving, breaking through the ward and making his way downstairs.

The threat was clear: step out of line and Harry can be taken away.

Chapter End Notes

Also going to mention that I plan to update What We May Be a bit. Just fixing some issues and fluffing up some of the rough writing
Chapter 20

Chapter Notes

I’d like to thank nani, rae and mau for being my sounding board when I have blocks. This one was a hard one and I wouldn’t have been able to get it out with you guys.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Bellatrix held the ancient, crumpled-up newspaper in her hand and looked at the door before her. A cruel, sharp smile danced across her lips in a spasm that made expression wobbly, like she was about to cry, even though she very clearly wasn’t.

She never cried.

She didn’t cry when And-, when she was disowned, she didn’t cry when she was betrothed, she didn’t cry when her mother died, she didn’t cry when her father wo—

Bellatrix knocked, a bit harder than was required, her knuckles pounding an arrhythmic staccato on the door and waited as patiently as possible in the frigid winter air. She was in a muggle neighbourhood and her robes caused her to stand out. The long navy-blue robes did not fit with the destitute area after all.

Her master had ordered her to find leverage on Skeeter and she would do so, gladly.

The whole country was tense, awaiting the decision of the Sacred 27, and this was the perfect time for her to do her work. He would be King and all other news would be overshadowed.

Like a murder, if it came to that.

There was the sound of walking and the door opened to reveal an older man. He had white hair and a white moustache, he was rail thin, almost starved looking. In his hand, he held an oak cane that he rested heavily on. He squinted at her and slid a pair of glasses from the top of his head onto his nose in an attempt to recognize who she was,

“Can I help you?” He croaked, sounding like he drank pipe tobacco by the litre, daily.

Bellatrix smiled as sweetly as she possibly could, which wasn’t very sweet at all but more of a grimace with teeth.

"May I come in?” she asked, “I was sent to ask you about some of your photography work at the Daily Prophet?” She was also attempting to do a sweeter, more saccharine voice than her usual fare, but it made her sound like was 3 years old and very whiny.

Subterfuge was not her strong point and she knew it. Loathed it.

He stood aside to let her enter, but a frown appeared beneath his moustache, ”My photography? I’ve been retired for over a decade Mistress Lestrange.”

Bella paused, she didn’t expect him to recognize her.
She entered the home, the walls were yellow and brown, and the house stank of tobacco smoke. It was a small building that probably only had three or four rooms in it, it was poor and lower class and she loathed it.

"I can assume the Prophet doesn't have a retirement fund?" Bellatrix said, her nose crinkling at the smell and hideousness of the home.

The walls were littered with portraits and framed front pages. None of the people in the pictures were of importance, just muggles or nobodies, with the exception of the previous Prime Minister.

Given what she could see from him and his surroundings he was a mudblood, and a poor one at that.

Filth.

He left her in the sitting room, but remained visible in his kitchenette, "Photographers with the Prophet and Witch Weekly are freelancers so we don't get paid a salary or benefits. May I offer you a cup of tea, Mistress Lestrange?" he asked with a rasp.

"No," she replied curtly, "I would like to ask you a few questions about Rita Skeeter."

The sounds within the kitchen stopped for a moment before resuming, "Afraid I can't help you there. I signed a non-disclosure agreement before I started working with Rita. . ." He exited the kitchen and cocked his head to the side, looking at her, "You are quite striking, I'm sure you've heard that before. Your jawline is divine, you have a few stereotypically masculine features but combined with your overly feminine ones makes you uniquely beautiful. A portrait, I think. Black and white. You definitely have the Rosier nose from your mother's side."

Her thoughts paused at this abundance of information, but none of it being what Bellatrix wanted. Her grip tightened on her wand as she stumbled over her tongue for words. "Did you attend school with my parents?"

She wanted to leave this hovel, but she needed to be a scalpel, not a sledgehammer. She needed to prove to her lord that she could act through subterfuge. That she was just as good, or even better than the Potter brat.

"No, I did not. I was just familiar with them through the society pages mainly," he opened up a cabinet and pulled out a small blocky box, a camera, "May I take your portrait?"

His question gave her pause. If she had to kill him for the information, she would have to make sure to remove any evidence.

Deep breath.

Scalpel.

Not Sledgehammer.

Her jaw ticked as she clenched it, "If I allow it, will you tell me about Skeeter?"

"I can tell you some things," he replied and began to walk away into one of the backrooms, resting heavily on his cane.

The door opened to what she could only assume was his studio. It was different from the painter’s studio she had been in; that had been filled with props and smelled of oil, but here a white sheet hung from the ceiling with a metal stool in front of it, "Have a seat while I get set up." He said and began
to attach the camera to the top of a tripod.

Bellatrix frowned and sat down as the man moved about the room, setting up lights, changing sheet from white to grey before leaving and turning off the screeching kettle.

She sat alone in the room for several minutes, holding her wand tightly like a totem, her thumbs tracing the grooves within the knotted wood. She knew that she wasn’t made for this. For words. She was a woman of violence and had been so for many years. Playing the game within high society bored her and she wasn’t the best at it. Narcissa had always outshined her with her ability to lie and Andro—

No. Now was not the time to think about that blood traitor.

"What would you like to know about Rita?" He asked as he reentered the room holding a cup of steaming tea in his hands.

"I need to know how she gets her information. Does she have an invisibility cloak?" Morgana’s massive mammories, she really wished she had more of Narcissa’s guile, but she hoped that her bluntness would have the man be open with her.

“Rita didn’t have an invisibility cloak, but she did buy one for me. Put your hands on your lap and turn to the left please.”

She did as he asked, but her jaw twitched at being asked to do so.

Filthy mudblood.

“And that’s how she gets the pictures?”

“Indeed. Also, a telephoto lens. I would also get photos by leaving a few cameras on a timer. Most people won’t notice them at all. Just perch it up on a bookshelf or ledge and leave it to go off. I personally preferred to shoot from a distance.”

“And how did she hear their conversations?”

The camera flashed, briefly blinding her.

“Lovely... I cannot disclose what Rita did,” he answered, “It was part of my contract with her. Her current photographer probably signed the same contract.”

She frowned heavily and mentally repeated her new mantra of “scalpel not sledgehammer” before cocked her head to the side, “May I... see this contract with her? I am more than willing to pay you for it.”

If words didn’t work, bribery would. And if bribery didn’t work imperio or crucio would.

The camera flashed several more times as he slowly wheeled it around to a different angle, “I may be able to dig it up for one as worthy as yourself Mistress Lestrange. What is the amount you are offering?”

“250 Galleons... and I must obliviate you.”

He had smiled at the amount and then his face fell at her caveat, he was not having it, “I would prefer not to be obliviated. You hear such horror stories about bad spells going awry, and I rather doubt that anything you find in the contract will be useful.” He laughed then, his voice sounding like a paper
bag being dragged across cobblestones, “Rita and I parted on poor terms and if you end up finding
something about Rita that you can blackmail her with. . . I will not cry a single tear.”

Death was always an option for after this meeting. Have one of her house elves watch him and his
 correspondence and if he tried to contact Skeeter she would return and kill him.

“Why did you stop working for her?”

“Don’t worry yourself about that Mistress Lestrange. I’m not saying I want to see Rita dead, but I
wouldn’t mind seeing her put in place.” The camera flashed, “I’ve not been a member of magical
Britain for quite some time, so tell me, just who has she upset enough to have a lovely lady such as
yourself seek me out?”

Bellatrix dug her fingers through her robe and into her flesh. She had heard of mudbloods returning
to the nonmagical world and breeding with muggles instead of finding another of their kind and
keeping their culture contained.

Mudbloods were obnoxious and useless but to give up their magic was a step too far for her taste.

“We know that Rita has been eavesdropping on certain members of the Sacred 27 and creating a fair
amount of discord by doing so. People have been having to face unjust accusations.” If he had been
away for the amount of time she assumed he had been, it would be better to just say the Sacred 27
instead of having to explain that there was soon to be a King after several centuries.

He let out a low whistle, “Playing with the Sacred 27? That is dangerous. I can see why you are
looking. I’ll go fetch that contract.”

He limped out of the room, leaving his cane behind. The sound of a metal drawer and paper being
rifled through was all she could hear.

250 galleons was quite a bit of money and the old man had barely seemed intrigued by it. Instead, he
was more focused on taking her picture for reasons she couldn’t fathom.

She knew she was beautiful. She had known from a young age that men would be attracted to her
and seek her favour, but his tone was that of someone who just found her aesthetically pleasing.

He was odd.

“Here you go.” A piece of flattened out parchment was held before her.

She hadn’t noticed his return, hadn’t heard a limping man making his way back. A quick glare his
way and she took it from his hands, making sure not to touch him.

She read it.

Most of it seemed standard non-disclosure agreement, like ones that they had had servants sign in the
past. Promising not to reveal anything regarding their family or what they did within their home.

One line gave her pause, it was an agreement not to reveal any physical characteristics that Rita
Skeeter possessed.

It was nonsensical. Everyone knew what she looked like. A blonde pest, she had looked like that
since they were in Hogwarts. Skeeter had buzzed around the purebloods and driven them insane
with her eavesdroppi—
Bella lifted her head and her eyes widened at the sudden revelation.

That’s why she hated Potter.

He reminded her of Skeeter.

It was all so clear.

He was an obnoxious and rude pain in her ass and had stolen Lord Slytherin away from more worthy suitors -she respected Lord Slytherin’s choice in the matter, he was a smart man and knew what he wanted- but it was mainly that he reminded her of that obnoxious twat of a human being.

Bellatrix pointed to the paragraph in question and raised a brow at the man, “It says here that you are not allowed to describe her physical characteristics. Which characteristics are we talking about?”

He smiled weakly, “I'm afraid I cannot divulge much, but it regarded her body and colouring mainly.”

She stared at him dumbfounded for a moment. It made no sense. The click of camera drew her from her shock.

He had begun to unscrew the camera from the tripod, “I'll develop these photos and send them to you later this week Mistress Lestrange. I do hope you end up liking my work.”

“Are you dismissing me?” She asked coolly but stood anyways, clutching her wand.

“Oh course not. I am merely an old man and it is late into the evening. I am afraid I might fall asleep on you, my dear.”

She strode out of the studio, pulled a leather purse from her pocket and placed it on the counter. 250 galleons would probably go a long way in this hovel, would probably last until his death, which could be soon if he attempted to contact Skeeter.

Maybe he could buy something to clean the stains from the walls. She doubted even magic could remove the cloying scent of tobacco.

“I . . . appreciate you letting me see the contract. Please do not inform anyone that I have been here.”

She commanded.

He laughed, “You have nothing to fear Mistress. I have no one to speak to in magical Britain. I was disowned by my family the moment they found out I was a squib. Your secret is safe with me.”

She paused, “I thought Smith was a common name in the muggle world.”

“You thought that I was a mudblood instead of from one of the older families? No, not quite. Thankfully, using a camera doesn’t require magic. It’s very easy to be discrete if most people won’t speak to you because you can’t use magic.” He winked at her, “I do hope you manage to have your fun with Rita.”
centuries out of date. Ugly little cherubs.

- The actual meeting room for Conclave isn’t too bad. The seats are comfy. Well, the Malfoy seats are. I doubt the Weasley seats are comfortable. There’s two for each family, one for the family head and one for the eldest child. Theo and Pansy are the only others from school that are present.
- This is so boring. I hate you so much. Why do I have to take notes on this? My father is giving me a look for taking notes. If my father has to hear that I’m doing this for you I will make your hair pink for a month.
- The old people are milling around and stinking up the place. I swear someone just used their robes as a commode.
- My father has informed me that this is just how Eglington Hall smells because there was no plumbing until the last century, so the scent just sank in. I am disgusted.
- I don’t think I’ve really managed to state how ugly these cherubs are. They look like they were sculpted to look like inbred centaurs that have inbred babies with inbred house elves and little stubby wings. Harry, you have to see these somehow, I really can’t put into word how hideous the damn things are. They make me want to retch, and no it’s not just the smell of years of no plumbing, though they are equal for reasons for me to vomit.
- Black is talking to Slughorn and Slughorn has his hand on Regulus’ lower back. Do they have a thing going on? I demand you find out and tell me, or maybe not. I’m imagining a Cornish pixie being crushed by a furiously humping Cerberus or something and that is forever seared into my mind.
- I guess that’s something else that makes me want to vomit. His moustache would probably devour Regulus. No, I must stop down this line of thought. I will be scarred for life. More so than usual.
- Forgot to mention that Lord Slytherin greeted everyone as we arrived. He was standing outside with the press and talking about it. I must say that he looked quite handsome with the snow in his hair. Not only do you manage to become involved with a handsome man, he’s also pureblooded royalty, the last descendant of a founder of Hogwarts. It’s not fair. I am far more handsome than you and I have a better pedigree. Also, you look similar enough to him as it is, and He would look good with a striking blond such as myself.
- I’m just saying that if it looks like you’re going to break up, tell me so I can be a shoulder for him to cry on.
- I have no idea who even brings this place to order.
- It’s my father. He’s telling everyone to sit down and shut up. Not in those words exactly. He would never tell someone to shut up. Shut their stupid mouth maybe. He says silence a lot and gives threatening looks. The Prewett woman is glaring at him.
- Ulysses Nott decided to stand up and put forth a motion that we vote on having a king. I am absolutely shocked (I am not). Everyone is yelling like this the first time they’ve heard of this idea. The two Weasley’s are almost as red as their hair. Maybe the father will have a heart attack and Ron Weasley will have to be pulled out for the rest of the year, so he can work in some fields or something.
- That’s what poor people do right? Farming? Honestly, I don’t think I’ve ever met a poor person outside of the Weasley’s and now the twins are ruining the status quo by having a decent shop. At least it’s regular people work and not something of the upper classes.
- Imagine Ron Weasley trying to run businesses or estates. They would go under in less than a month. I doubt he has a single drop of business acumen in his body.
- Weasley keeps looking over to the Longbottom seat for back up but no one is there. Is it wrong that I want to laugh about that?
- Just what is up with the Weasley family? They claim to be muggle lovers and are obsessed with it, but they are members of the Sacred 27 and have kicked out a squib family member. Why are they perceived like they are better than us by mudbloods muggle-borns? They’re the exact same except poor.
Are poor people considered to be morally better than wealthy people because they must struggle? It doesn’t make sense. The Weasley family is idiotic and they’ve made themselves poor by not using contraceptive spells. He works for the Ministry and it’s not the best job, but he’s been able to support 7 children and a stay at home wife. If he had stopped after the third child, they would have been more comfortable poor. I also wouldn’t have had to put up with Ron Weasley.

Note to Self: Create Time Turner that can go back in time and stop them from having children beyond three.

Nevermind: Ginerva Weasley is easy on the eyes and I don’t want to deprive myself of that.

Harry, I know you asked me to take notes about Conclave and not my questions about poverty and moral’s but they have not stopped yelling and I have a headache. Normally I would care about what’s going on but our side is just sitting back and letting the others grow hoarse. I think Shacklebolt burst a blood vessel in his eye.

They’re quieter now and my father is giving them the reasons why we should have a king. I loathe to say that he sounds like a sycophant but Lord Slytherin is useful.

You know Slytherin will just be a figurehead for one side of the Sacred 27, right? He won’t have any real power for decades.

If he stays with you will you adopt? You need children for a royal line after all. Maybe he’ll get a queen from some other country and you can be Maîtresse-en-titre like Madame de Pompadour and Louis XV. You’d probably like that. Power behind the throne and all of that. You get to talk and lay on your back as your job (I think you do that already right now?)

Harry put down the pages of notes for a minute and pinched the bridge of his nose. How many pages of thinly veiled insults and ranting about the poor did he have to put up with?

Now, Slughorn is going on about how we don’t need a King and that we have a democracy after all these years and if we should have had a king it should have been Dumbledore after Grindelwald was defeated which is utter dragon shit. Took the old goat years to get the courage to fight him. If we had had a king back, then the king could have just ordered Dumbledore to do so.

That’s the problem with democracies. People can just let others go on murdering people instead of stepping up and doing something about it. A King has the Divine right to boss people around.

If I was king I would have the Weasley’s as my gardeners since they’re so good with their hands and Longbottom would be kicked out of England for being such a squib.

All squibs would be banished or killed so they wouldn’t pollute the bloodlines. It’s a kindness really. Look at Filch. He’s dreadful. We bring muggle-borns into our world when they have magic but why don’t squibs go into the muggle world? They could just be given to some muggles. Left on the doorstep. They would probably like having a child given to them. People like that right?

I honestly know nothing about muggles and people who have children. Merlin, can you believe that one day I will have children? This is why house elves and nannies are important.

This building is so disgusting. I just saw a bug crawl across a tapestry and part of the tapestry crumbled beneath it and fell into Prewett’s hair.

Shacklebolt says that we shouldn’t be looking at having a king but looking to get rid of the Sacred 27 altogether and "allowing society to grow beyond its medieval constraints." He really said that. I can’t believe he would compare the gentry to medieval society. We’re much better than them. We don’t even have serfs anymore.

Now there is a ton of people yelling at Shacklebolt and saying that will never happen and that’s not what we’re here for and that he’s more than welcome to vacate the Shacklebolt seat to another family.

So, I got up to use the bathroom and I came back to Weasley and Yaxley unconscious and half
the room with drawn wands. It's sort of tense and I'm not going to ask. Ask Pansy later. I don't care.

- Harry dear, I know you're going "Why does Draco not care that he's at an event of monumental importance that will shape our society for decades to come?" The answer is the Firewhiskey I drank before coming.
- I broke the lock on your trunk by the way.
- Why am I even doing this? You will know the answer anyways by the time I see you. Harry this is so dreadfully boring minus the fist fight going on.
- Shacklebolt stunned everyone involved. Stupid Weasley’s.
- I think Pansy might be dead. She was laughing so hard that I think she may have passed out.
- Nott started throwing curses and it's gotten worse. I'm under the table and it is sticky. Why is it sticky!? What have generations of Malfoy’s been doing under here!?
- My grandfather’s name is carved on one of the legs.
- I fell asleep. My bad.

Lucius was the last one to enter the building. A deep bow to his master and the doors closed behind him as he strode away, determined to secure the legacy of his family for centuries to come.

Heh.

Snow fell heavily around him and on him. It stuck to the wool robe he wore and was in his hair and eyelashes. It was that kind of weather that insulated you from the world. It was humid and warm despite the actual weather. Tom loved it when the world was like this. When it was heavy and dark, and it was only him and his surroundings. It was much better than the biting cold that he had suffered in his early years at Wools.

There was a flash of a bulb to his left which he ignored. The major publications, home and international, had sent photographers there to document all that they could.

Not that there was much to document.

No one was allowed within the sacred walls of Eglington Hall, and today he would not be illicitly entering them as he had to watch Barty Crouch Jr. take his father's place.

But for the last hour, he had been greeting and speaking with the press and Sacred 27. The ones that would speak to him that was. The Weasleys certainly seemed to loathe him.

It was mutual.

He wished the reporters farewell as they began to leave for a few hours, as it would surely take many hours for Conclave to come to any sort of consensus.

If only he could imperius them all and have it done in five minutes.

Tom brushed the snow off his shoulders and circled the building. He loathed it. A centuries-old church that had been confiscated from muggles shortly after they had built it in the mid-fifteenth century. Ample use of memory charms and muggle repellent and it had become the property of a now-deceased line.

It still retained its look of a church on the outside but within it was large and opulent, yet dark and
sinister. Many monumental decisions had been made within these walls that no one except members of the Sacred 27 could enter.

Supposedly.

The first time he had entered the supposed hallowed halls, it had been winter, just after his seventeenth birthday and he had left the school grounds to just look at Eglington Hall. He had read that that the Sacred 27 had made it so only blood ties could enter and had added the Gaunt family to the banned list. Temptation had been too strong for him though and he had unlocked the door and entered for nothing to happen. He had not been banished, cursed, hexed, jinxed, or teleported to a prison cell.

He had checked for all kinds of magic that day but had found nothing, hoping to uncover some sort of secret blood magic, but all the damn mysticism was only rumoured, just words, no danger.

But everything about it, he hated.

The muggle exterior and history, the corruption and wealth, the exclusionism.

He would raze it to the ground.

He spun on his heel and apparated to Riddle manor and made his way to his office where he still had work to do.

He pulled the Degas away from the wall, revealing the safe behind it. The dial spun under his nimble fingers, 42 to the right, 14 to the left, 35 to the right, the lock mechanism clicking open with a whirring sound and the magic protecting the contents of the vault faded as it recognized the combination and his magical signature. He slowly opened the door and lifted the painting from its place against the side, it was still wrapped in somnus paper from when he had put him in a month ago.

Tom held the wrapped painting close to his chest, both from the ache that he had felt from not seeing his favoured Horcrux and relieved that the paper would provide him with a modicum of protection in case his counterpart was feeling rather vindictive about the whole thing. He closed the vault door with a small shove, before returning to his desk and gently laying the small frame across it.

He would likely be upset over the cold shoulder he had received after his failed attempt to kill Harry. While he couldn’t leave to wander the portraits around the manor during that time, he would have been able to enter a sort of stasis, or at least distract himself with theoretical magic. Cutting the string that bound the paper in place, he slowly began to unwrap it, wary of a wayward hex coming at him.

No such thing happened.

The back of the painting faced him, the runes on the back barely visible, he flipped it, expecting an angry retort and a steely glare.

No such thing happened.

The frame was empty of his counterpart.

“Sulking in the back? I expected a bit more maturity from you,” Tom mused and leant forward, resting his chin on the palm of his hand, “but you did try to murder a child so maybe not.”

No response.
He shook his head bemusedly and hung the painting on the wall next to his desk. Tom could wait for him to appear or he could start throwing hexes at it. Ultimately, he turned away from it; he could only sulk for so long before wanting to be snide at him.

With a sigh, he sat down and pulled out his correspondence and tried not to think about Conclave. The numbers were on their side. He would be king. It was known.

He threw himself into writing letter after letter, hoping to avoid his sudden nerves. The invisible electricity that seemingly crackled along his skin that woke up old memories of air raid sirens and the sounds of bombs.

Tom cursed.

He had long ago learned to control his emotions but lately, they had been more on the surface. Easily accessible. He wanted to blame Harry but couldn’t find it in his heart to do so.

He gently placed the quill on his desk and left to his bedroom and the hot shower within that he refused to leave for more than an hour. He stood beneath the hot blast, just absorbing the heat and working the chill, that was not weather related, from his bones.

Of all the technology that wizards had refused to adapt from the muggles, he was grateful that showers had managed to sneak past their stringent and nonsensical rules.

He reentered the room, towelling his hair dry, and his eyes fell on the painting of his counterpart. The frame was still empty. Tom frowned. Yes, he had been left in the vault for a month and unable to leave, but he did have things to do within the painting itself. Not enough for a full month worth but they had both survived through worse boredom.

His eyes slowly took in each stroke of the art, each hastily brushed piece of it. The artist hadn’t been the best out there. She had captured his likeness well enough, but the background was under detailed. More of an impressionist piece when he would have preferred something by Durer. He was still fond of it, but for a piece of art that housed a part of his soul… it could feel flat at times.

He drew closer to the painting to the point that his lips were nearly brushing it and whispered a single word, his word, what he called himself in his heart of hearts, the word that would always draw his soul forward.

Voldemort.

Tom smiled as his counterpart strode forward from within the background. His expression cold and glowering, “Well, what do you need of me? Have you grown tired of having to listen to inane people babbling their uneducated opinions at you and have deemed me useful again? I doubt you’ve gotten rid of your,” he grimaced, his lips pursing like he had just bitten into the sourest lemon out there, “paramour.”

“I never intended for it to be a permanent situation darling.” Tom crooned, his hands stroking up and down the painting’s frame. “It was a heated moment of passion. We were both angry, there was some yelling, some minor curses fired off at each other, which was all preceded by one of us, not me, attempting to murder someone that I am fond of.

“I hope you can find it in your heart to understand why I did what I did. I would expect you to do the same honestly.” Tom said earnestly with a small nod of his head at the end, causing his hair to bounce slightly.

The painting remained standing there with a sour look on his face and his arms crossed. "Is that all I
am to get of an apology?"

Laughter cut through the room, a high staccato tone that would have made anyone who heard it very uncomfortable in their bones, it was high and cold, "We never apologize. That's part of being a Dark Lord. So, no, I will not apologize to you and you know exactly why. You disobeyed me and attempted to kill Harry. Even if he was not something I... appreciate, he is still a decent addition to my entourage. I was justified in my rage."

The painting didn't react, except to look at a point on the wall behind Tom's head.

"Fine. Have it your way." He took the somnus paper and began to lay it out on the desk, ready to rewrap the painting.

"Do you ever consider what you would do if you were trapped in a two-dimensional form? Unable to do anything? Or a book?" His voice wasn't emotional, but it sounded raw. The hostile civility worn off for once.

Tom paused his hand on the paper, feeling the magic of his body stop where it was touching. His mouth was dry at the memories that surfaced, a cool damp room, nothingness, rage, helplessness, suffering, a lack of sensation, longing for something more. His fist clenched of its own volition, crushing the paper beneath it, "You know I do."

"I do hope you'll remember it more clearly the next time you decide to shove me in the vault." He said snapped.

Tom's fingers tapped on the paper, "I will reconsider this in the future, but for now we must talk."

"Are we in danger?"

Tom glanced towards the middle of the floor of his office, paintings from around the manor were in a pile on the floor, "You could say that. We have a spy in our midst." His glance went from the stack of canvases to his painted counterpart, "I wouldn't suspect you in the first place but you're the only one that I know couldn't have been involved, especially since you were wrapped in somnus paper."

The painting's lips twitched into a grimace of a smile before turning back down, into a thin-lipped expression. "And what makes you think that we have a spy?"

Tom began folding the somnus paper up, his hands slowly smoothing it over and over as he stared at the paintings, "Potter came over recently and suffered an injury. Avery knew."

"Are you sure it was one of the paintings? What if it was Potter?"

Tom's head whipped around, red eyes pinning the painting with a fearsome glare, "Enough of that!" He snarled, his hand slashing through the air, "You will stop with your accusations! One month is nothing compared to what it could be!"

"I am you! You are me! We are one! I am your bloody soul and you are leaving me locked up because I would dare to besmirch the honour of some boy that will be dust and ashes in the next century! He is nothing! He is not worth our time and, yet you throw me, ME! I have a right to my anger and suspicion! You have been compromised by emotion!" The painting spat, "And now you have the taken the only places I may go outside of my frame because you think that Avery has a spy within them! What about the inner circle or the house selves or just some random person watching the manor seeing the idiot injure himself?! We are one! Do not turn me away!" His face was twisted, the brushstrokes wrapping around to match his expression of rage, making him look bestial.
Tom pursed his lips, "I want your word that you will leave him alone. If he dies, I will either reintegrate you or move you to the journal."

The painting didn’t respond except to walk away into the background.

“So be it,” Tom whispered and turned to the stack of paintings and lit them aflame with a flick of his wand.

In the shadows of his library, the painting watched as his network went up in flames. He watched his only way to protect his stubborn, love-obsessed counterpart go up in flames. Impotent to stop him. Unless Tom decided to repopulate the house with paintings his only course of action would be to utilize Potter.

He was pulling out correspondence from the Chevalier Aubert, a French noble whom he was allied with when a loud crack sounded through the room.

Dapper stood before him, his expression neutral, “Lord Malfoy has arrived. Shall I bring him to the study?” The house elf asked, his expression darting to the odd pile on the floor near Tom’s desk.

“No, I will meet him in the foyer,” Tom stated, and the elf vanished with another crack. They needed mufflers. A quick glance at the painting confirmed that his counterpart was still hidden away, pouting for the loss of his freedom. He might replace the lost paintings.

Might.

Trenton Spriggs’ body was laid out on the slab. The cold mist in the air had coalesced onto his nude form, painting him white and blue, the hair on his chest coated with frost making them look like grass in the early morning. They had cleaned the blood off of him but the deep gashes down his arms were still there, neat and gaping. Skin, fat, sinew, and the hint of white revealing that it was bone deep.

He lifted the arm and examined it closely. It spanned from the crook of the elbow to an inch below the palm of the hand, the cut travelling between the radius and ulna and it was the same for the other arm. One deep slice with no hesitation.

This was fucky as fuck.

James reached into his cloak pocket and felt around for the small disposable camera that he had bought at a chemist shop before entering the Ministry.

Spriggs had no known family and his body was to be cremated at the end of the day, meaning that this was James’ only chance to document the body. Wand in hand, James rapped his wand sharply and cast Specialis Revelio, in hopes of revealing any hexes or curses that had been placed on the man.

There was nothing. No restraining marks or spells outside of the severing charms that were used for the man’s supposed suicide. Priori incantatem had been cast on the man’s wand and had shown two severing charms which had been preceded by an Avada Kedavra and other curses that had been thrown into the fight with Frank and Crouch.

Of the curses, only one caught his attention, one he vaguely recognized but could not put his finger on where he knew it from. He knew that it was something early in his career. Something from years ago. It was a slight touch in his memory.
Sectumsempra.

It was the curse that had removed Frank’s arm. He made a mental note to search through his early cases as he was certain that was where it originated from. Something that vicious would likely be linked to a murder.

James puffed his cheeks and let out a deep sigh, his breath coming out in a cold white mist. He had not had many early cases that involved dead bodies back when he had started, mostly muggle baiting incidences and being put on the obliviation task force after the Quidditch World Cup riot of 1982.

The murder and assault cases he had been put on in those years were few and far between. Frank and Alice had been favourites among the older Aurors for their level-headed approach and relatively clean Hogwarts records, unlike himself. They had been apprenticed with Moody and fast-tracked for promotion while he had been obliviating muggles. Not that it mattered in the end, he and Frank had ended up in the same position and Alice had ended up working with Crouch as senior lead Auror.

Now, being the head Auror in charge of their own teams wasn’t something to be ashamed of but the DMLE didn’t allow for much upward advancement since people tended to live very long lives. People thought Crouch would have tried to aim for the position of Minister of Magic, but it never happened. If they had been at war, maybe.

Crouch had been a firm hand within the department but not what they needed during a time of relative peace. People like Fudge had thrived in the complacency of the years and now because of that, they had a King.

And now with Crouch dead, Frank maimed, and Alice on leave to help Frank with his recovery, it was left on James and the rest of the department to pick up the pieces. Amelia being promoted from the law side of the DMLE was better than losing one of their own to a promotion in this time of stress and panic. Shacklebolt would have been a good choice as head of DMLE but was required a take over Alice’s role as liaison and Senior Head Auror.

He tucked the camera into his pocket and spun on his heel. He had the photos and reports he needed. The mortuary may have been cleaned regularly with disinfectant spells, but the entire case stank to the high heavens. No hesitation marks, the man seemingly was able to cut both arms even after slicing down to the bone and sinew. The autopsy report gave an approximate time of death within two hours of the murder of Crouch which was one of the more intelligent things the actual killer had done outside of using Sprigg’s wand.

It was on him now to find out if Crouch was assassinated on the behalf of a royalist conspiracy, as he suspected, or if it was for something else. . . No matter the outcome he would bring the perpetrators to justice.

The door slammed behind him with a heavy thud, echoing through the roughly hewn walls of the deepest section of the Ministry below the Thames. Rivulets of icy water had carved their way into the stone over the centuries before dripping into the gutters on each side of the hall. He loathed this part of the Ministry. It made his stomach twist and his skin rise in gooseflesh. Long before it had been the mortuary it had been a prison, and he would swear that he could feel the essence of the people that had been tormented within for centuries before Azkaban.

It was with a great feeling of relief that he stepped onto the lift and the chill from the morgue faded from him, but the righteous anger he felt within flared to life as he stepped out and was greeted by a copy of the Daily Prophet sitting on a bench. It had Lord Slytherin’s smug face on it. His stupid handsome face with his stupid hair and his stupid locket and his stupid robes and his stupid fucking
victory over everything that was good and right in the world. Stupid corrupt Sacred 27 and stupid corrupt Wizengamot and stupid bloody people and his own bloody son was stupid too!

He stopped before heading into the bullpen where everyone could see him and instead beelined for the bathroom and hid away in the stall the furthest from the door.

One.

Two.

Three.

Four.

Five.

The skin on his knuckles split open on the sixth hit to the stone and blood began to stain it with each subsequent strike. Minutes passed, and he continued his assault on the wall, his skin tearing open to the bone. His hands and the wall covered in a growing circle of blood.

The sudden sound of the door opening snapped him from his violence and he stopped and stood there, his head pressed against the wall. Tears of rage and frustration pouring down his face.

It wasn’t fair.

None of it was fair. The bad guys had won and now they would have to pick up the pieces. To try and fix the world from their actions. To repair the damage they will have caused. Picking up the pieces and hoping to glue it all back together with nothing but spit and hope.

He bit back a sob that threatened to shake his whole body to the very core. If he broke down, the world around him would crumble and he wouldn’t be able to fix it. If he fell now he wouldn't be able to get back up, he would be done for, but that couldn't happen, he couldn't let that happen. Not today. Not when today was the day the world needed people to protect it, to start the fight against the corruption and the tyranny.

The system was broken, but he was not. Not yet anyway. He would do what was right, what was just. He would defend and protect what he could. He would help save the world from the degeneracy that it was steeped in and that meant that he would not break.

He would be strong. For Lily. For Harry. For Alice and Frank and their son. For all the sons and daughters of their generation and the generation after theirs. Slytherin would be exposed for his crimes. He would be revealed to the world as what he was.

A monster.

He just prayed that Harry wouldn't fall with Slytherin.

James exhaled heavily, his fingers wrapping around the wand, the wounds on his hands singing a chorus of agony. He vanished the blood but left his hands alone.

The pain was real. The pain made it easy to focus on what was real. It was good. It burned in his soul. If he could focus on the pain, then it would guide him down the right path.
February 4th

CONCLAVE IN CHAOS

By: The Daily Prophet Senior Staff

Two days ago, our world was changed.

The Sacred 27 voted that our country would once again have a monarch. We all know the news that it happened but only a few people know what truly happened within the walls of Eglington Hall just two short days ago.

We at the Prophet were pressured to not publish this article, but we deserve to know which families have chosen our fate. Through an anonymous source, that has been thoroughly vetted by our editorial team at the Prophet, we can reveal who voted for Lord Slytherin and who voted against.

The families that voted against reinstating a monarch: Abbott, Fawley, Greengrass, MacMillan, Parkinson, Prewett, Shacklebolt, Shafiq, and Weasley.

The families that voted for reinstating a monarch: Avery, Black, Bulstrode, Burke, Carrow, Crouch, Flint, Lestrange, Malfoy, Nott, Ollivander, Rosier, Rowle, Selwyn, Slughorn, Travers, and Yaxley.

The Longbottom family was absent due to an injury.

Nine families voted against and seventeen voted in favour.

We at the Daily Prophet believed that the vote would be much closer than it was. We believed that Lord Slytherin would win or lose by a margin of one to two votes. It is surprising to see where some of the families voted.

It was widely believed that Parkinson would vote in favour, but perhaps their business interests will not function well within a monarchy.

Ollivander, Selwyn and Slughorn voting in favour was also quite a shock for our anonymous source, but even before the vote could enter into play there were duels and fistfights that took place. If our most Sacred of institutions is so fractured on this subject how are we as a society supposed to feel about this?

The Daily Prophet is cautiously optimistic, but—

“Jezzer, enough.” Avery said softly, “One of the reasons that the votes within Eglington Hall are kept from the public is to protect our families from blowback and scorn. I don’t believe that any of the families would break with break the covenant, even the Weasley’s.”

“Slytherin has already assigned someone to deal with Skeeter. I suggest we expand their orders to the Prophet’s information bank. If we have someone who is an informant within the Sacred 27 we will need to keep this quiet and not draw attention.” Flint replied.

“What else could it be?” Nott grumbled, “No one else was there except families. The children understand the importance of silence. I know my son would never speak of it.”

Avery’s lips pursed into a straight line, before he turned his head to Flint, “Have Slytherin expand his assets search.”

Flint nodded and left with a small bow to each of them.
The room was silent as Nott stared at Avery, his bloodshot eyes twitching, “What did you call me here for if it wasn’t for the damned article?”

“I thought that we should talk.”

“We talk at least once a week.”

“I am aware of this. I want to ensure that you do not do anything brash. Right now, is a delicate time for us. He has not been crowned King and I know you despise the Potter bloodline. We have Slytherin where we need him and if he needs to take solace in a half-blood, so be it. It would be beneficial if we could fully recruit Potter to us, not just to Thomas.”

Nott grumbled and shifted in his chair, “You call him Lord Slytherin but we all know that he’s still that filthy orphan Tom Riddle. He has the pedigree that we needed but he’s still scum.” Nott grumbled.

“Leave him and the boy alone,” Avery spoke softly, but the threat in his voice was real. “Your emotions have been getting the best of you lately.”

The tension between them was palpable. The elderly house elf stood off to the side, his eyes focused on Nott, ready to protect his master from any attacks.

A sudden bark of laughter from Nott cut through the air, “Fine. I’ll leave it to you to clean up any mess Riddle and the boy make.” He stood up and smiled at Avery, even though the man couldn’t see his expression, “I will know if anyone is sent to... silence me.”

Avery’s brows pinched together, “I wouldn’t have you assassinated Ulysses. I would just tell you that your son had declared his undying love for a mudblood and watch you die from a stroke.”

Nott’s face transformed into a hideous scowl, “That is not funny.”

“Nothing is. Bide your time and we shall all be rewarded.”

“You don’t understand,” Nott whispered, “You don’t understand the burden of having an heir and protecting them from the filth that is around us and you never will. You are blind in more than just sight but blind to the suffering that we must do to ensure our families continuation. You were doomed the moment he took your sight, but we, Flint and I, we have to carry on our legacies, but you’ve known for decades that the Avery line will die out with you.”

The room was silent. Nott held his wand at the ready, oblivious to Avery’s house elf that stood behind him, ready to defend its master.

“Get out.” Avery commanded, ice dripping from his words.

Nott left.

Chapter End Notes

*deep breath* Oooooh boy this one had a lot of stuff in it. Sorry for the delay but the holidays were crazy for me.
I can't believe I've been writing this fic for over a year and just now got to Conclave!
I've been having slower uploads for a while because I've been working on having
longer chapters, aiming for 8-10k each chapter.
I want to thank all of you for your support. Your comments and support mean the world
to me and makes my day. <3
Harry looked in the mirror with a critical eye and attempted to slick back his hair again.

He failed.

He always did.

Sometimes he could force his hair into a modicum of order, but today was not one of those days. Too many random hair strands were in full out rebellion against him, his fringe was more behaved, but the ones in the back were assembling the guillotine and calling for a revolution.

Not even Sleakeazy's could quell the revolt, and if he tried any harder he would end up looking like Draco when they first met. Frankly, he would rather die than look like an eleven-year-old Draco.

All he wanted was to look presentable.

Welp, it wasn't going to happen.

With a resigned sigh, he grabbed his winter robe and slid it on. He contemplated bringing his bag which no longer contained a very angry chocolate frog card that had been yelling at him for at least 20 minutes for even thinking about doing this.

Shoving him into a silenced drawer had been satisfying, but at least he didn't wrap him in somnus paper beforehand. He was still free to wander the portraits of Hogwarts.

Harry hoped he wouldn’t be yelled at on his way out.

Painting Tom’s ability to interact with the Hogwarts paintings had surprised Harry, and he had actually had the decency to explain that being within a chocolate frog card while within Hogwarts allowed him to roam freely. Any wards that the card entered would allow him to access other magical paintings, and the moment the physical card left he would be returned to the small bit of cardboard, or the painting in Tom’s home.

Before tonight’s little shouting-fest he had barely seen the prick for a few days. He had been sulking somewhere around Hogwarts, maybe spying on the teachers or some of the students. Maybe being scathing at the Gryffindors. At least it meant that there was less of him whinging about how Harry should focus on learning occlumency.

It wasn't that Harry was bad at clearing his mind, but nothing ever seemed to happen; he would just lay there in bed with his mind blank and then fall asleep. How was he supposed to make barriers if there were no barriers to construct? Sometimes he would swear that painting Tom was very bad at teaching people without verbally ripping them apart.
The painting had told Harry that he would pull him into a dream at some point and go over it then. Harry prayed it would not end with injury given that the painting was almost always aggravated.

With a quick glance at his dresser drawer and a nod to Blaise, the only person who had opted to not attend any festivities, he left the dorms.

Now, the question was, which route to take out of the castle? His invisibility cloak was in his pocket, so he was safe to sneak to an exit; he wanted to be presentable, which meant no sweat, red face, no frostbite, no dirt, or anything of the sort. That only left the passage inside the witch, it would still be quite a long walk to get to the apparition point but it was his only real choice, even if the slide was horrible to climb out of.

Merlin, he wished that students that were of age could just come and go freely. They shouldn’t be beholden to the rules of Hogwarts over the rules of the ministry.

He walked through the common room and into the dungeons proper and began his ascent to the hallway with the witch. No teacher should theoretically bother him as it was only just after dinner, and if asked he could say he was going to the Owler. Given the late hour and the fact that the witch statue was not near the library or any of the common rooms, he was safe.

“Harry! Harry! Stop! Are you deaf!?” Shouted a familiar voice from behind him.

Harry turned and felt like he had been hit in the face with the killing curse, “. . .H- Hermione?”

Hermione was rushing towards him, her hair pinned up, but with a few curls escaping to frame her face for a stylish look. She wore a dark blue travelling robe that he had never seen before, and had a bit of makeup on, accentuating her brown eyes; simply put, she looked gorgeous.

“I’ve been chasing you since the Great Hall!” She said between gasps of air, holding onto her knees as she fought to catch her breath, “What are you doing up here?” She eventually asked, eyeing his own travelling robes with suspicion.

They were both dressed to go out and the other knew it. Given that there was only one event that was going to be happening, it was clear where they were going.

“Walking,” Harry replied glibly, “It’s not a crime to walk is it?” He brushed some invisible lint off his robe, “What about you? You’re all… looking stunning and everything.”

Hermione’s eyes widened briefly at the compliment, and she bit her bottom lip before looking away, “I was just on a walk as well.” Her voice was soft, almost hesitant.

Harry licked his lips, “Was your walk going to take you to Kensington Palace by any chance?”

“Was yours?” She shot back but regretted her tone immediately.

He chuckled, and put a hand on his hip before responding, “Perhaps.”

“Care to escort me then?” She asked in a haughty tone that he knew was a mockery of Pansy. Hermione held her chin up and stared down her nose at him, daring him to say no.

Harry would never admit it but in this moment, she reminded him strongly of Narcissa instead of Pansy.

He glanced around the hallway to ensure no one was present, “Alright.” He took her gloved hand and lead her further down the hall to the statue of the crone and tapped it with his wand, muttered *Dissendium*. The tunnel opened with a burst of dust that sent Hermione sneezing.
She covered up her nose and cast *Tergeo*, syphoning all the excess dust away, “How far down does that go?”

He shrugged, “Maybe 6 feet. I’ll go first.” He cast *Lumos* and slid down. “Okay, maybe 8 feet.”

A frown graced her face as she tucked her feet up on top of her travelling robe and slid down as well. Hermione hit the stone floor with a small “oof” and he helped her to her feet.

As the statue slid back into place she said, “I’m not even going to ask how you know about this. Where does it come out?”

“How’d you know about this Honeydukes,” He answered as they made their way into the tunnel, “Don’t tell anyone about this. It’s one of the few tunnels that’s still available and I’m fairly certain you and I are the only people in Hogwarts that know about it.” Harry looked back, his wand illuminating Hermione’s face, “And how were you going to sneak out tonight if you hadn’t found me?”

The look she gave him was absolutely cheeky, the little quirk of her lips, “I was going to borrow one of the school brooms and fly over the gates. Apparate from there.”

Harry was impressed, given how much Hermione hated riding brooms and breaking rules, but she had been entirely ready to do so. “Care to tell me why you’re trying to get into Kensington Palace? I didn’t think it was your kind of party”

“It’s a historic event! Even if the results have been tampered with,” he could feel her glare burning the hairs on the back of his head, “it is a historic occasion and I would like to somehow be apart of it. Even if it’s just watching.”

“Want to tell your theoretical kids that you were there when Lord Slytherin had his celebration party? It’s not like he’s going to be coronated tonight.”

“Well, no, but it would still be nice to experience something like this. I’ve never been to one of these types of parties... It might be one of my last nights to do so.” Her voice had softened, and he heard her stop walking.

Harry turned, “Hermione? Wh—What do you mean?”

She was wringing her hands together, her bottom lip quivering, “Harry, I don’t understand you! Your mother is a muggleborn, and I’m your friend and he’s—” she swung out her hand, attempting to make a grand gesture but just hitting it on the tunnel wall, “He supports hurting muggleborns! All of his friends are purebloods that want people like me!” Hermione’s voice broke and tears formed in her eyes.

He approached slowly, afraid that she would run if he moved any faster and pulled her into a tight hug. “Hermione. Please. You have to trust me. Tom is a good person. I swear it. I know him differently than you do. You’ve only seen his public visage. He doesn’t want to enslave or kill muggleborns. I swear it.”

She held onto him and sniffed, “I want to believe you, Harry. I do... but do you actually know him? What if that is a face he wears just because he wants you to think that?” Hermione pulled away, her makeup had run a small bit around her eyes and he pulled out a handkerchief for her.

“I feel confident that I know the real Tom, and one day, hopefully after we’ve graduated, you’ll get to know him too. I know he will love you. You’re a certifiable genius. You’re passionate, and you always think about things that need to be done to help better society. The two of you are pretty similar.”
Hermione had pulled out a compact and was dabbing at her eyes, but gave him a strange look that he couldn’t identify, “You think I’m like him?”

“I do, and I want you to get the chance to see that one day. I know that when you meet, be it today or at Hogsmeade, that the two of you will hit it off. Hell, I’ll probably end up being the third wheel while you two nerds talk.” He said with a weak chuckle, “Please trust my judgement on this.”

Her lips pursed and her brow creased, looking similar to McGonagall and his mother, “I will try. Shall we continue on? I’ve never been to Honeydukes while closed.”

“Oh, we won’t be going into Honeydukes, the apparition ward is about halfway down the tunnel and we can leave from there.”

Hermione blinked, “How will we get back in?”

“We can either break into Honeydukes and go through that entrance, one of the other’s, skirt the edge of the forest for a while, or, knowing my luck, get caught by a family member and escorted back later.”

Hermione chuckled, “If we end up in the society pages of the Prophet, we will definitely be caught.”

He shrugged, “Draco and a few others will be there too. Maybe they’ll focus more on them.”

“I think they’ll focus on you. You are Lord Slytherin’s paramour, after all.” Hermione had smirked when she said paramour and he fought the urge to smirk back, “Why can’t they just say you’re his boyfriend?”

“Too casual for a king, I think. And as it is… I don’t know if we’ll be able to get through the door and into the party proper.”

“What!? You don’t have an invitation?!” She had paused again and was staring at him.

“Well, no. I’m supposed to be in school right now. I’m sure he would have sent one if I had aske— Actually, I doubt he even planned this thing or was involved in the least. How were you going to get in?”

“I was going to sweet talk the guards into letting me in.”

He wondered if she would actually be able to do so, “And if that didn’t work?”

“I would have figured out something. When I saw you dressed to the nines, I thought that all my problems were solved, but apparently not.” Hermione chuckled, and he could imagine that small quirk to her lips she did when she felt something was amusing but annoying as well.

“Hopefully the guards will recognize me and let you in as my plus one. If not we can stand outside and heckle the obscenely rich.”

“Do you mean your boyfriend?”

“I wouldn’t say he’s obscenely rich. Wealthy, yes.”

“MmmHmm. Sounds fake.”

Harry paused, his eyes falling onto an etched in line on the wall, denoting the end of the wards, “We’re here. Shall we go?”

Harry paused, his eyes falling onto an etched in line on the wall, denoting the end of the wards, “We’re here. Shall we go?”
Hermione nodded and they both apparated to Kensington Palace.

They arrived on the edge of a huge crowd of people surrounding the palace, pressing up close to the gates, cameras flashing, and people shouting at those who were entering.

There was a flash of white-blond hair and Harry could spot the Malfoy's at the entrance, showing the guard a set of invitations.

Shit.

He didn't have invitations. Tom hadn't actually invited him. Although he imagined Tom had nothing to do with this celebration and that it was organized by someone else, someone lesser in status than him and before him and Harry had been an item. Who would think to invite the school-age something-or-other of Lord Slytherin? Certainly not the person who arranged all this.

Shit.

Okay, he knew that this was coming, he had told Hermione as much. The challenge was getting past the guards.

Harry grasped Hermione's hand and began to drag her through the crowd, pushing up against people in the pulsing throng.

Merlin, this reminded him of the muggle paparazzi and the princess. It was madness. He heard several people shouting at one another in different languages. He guessed this was international news at the very least. It had been over 3 centuries since they had a King after all.

He recognized a few faces amongst the crowd, Bernard Crocker, the reporter from the Prophet, was one of them. No blonde with an acid quill and a history of being a vicious cunt was present though. Maybe she had snuck her way inside.

Merlin, he would not weep the day she got what was coming to her.

Slowly but surely, they managed to push people to the side and get to the cleared spot for the invited guests to enter the palace. It wasn't a red carpet-it would have been a waste of carpet anyways given the snow- but instead a completely cleared walkway that glittered like gold. It was blocked off by a small fence that Harry and Hermione jumped without getting their dress robes tangled within.

The people they had nearly landed on gave them a dirty look for a moment before seemingly recognizing Harry, before nodding and turning away. They stepped into place behind them and ahead of a white-haired man that was by himself.

The people in front of them were the Selwyns. Old money, old power.

"I can't believe the guards didn't notice us," Hermione whispered, holding his arm tightly.

Harry couldn't agree more but thanked his lucky stars that someone seemed to be watching out for them. The trick would still be getting through the doors.

The line moved slowly, each person had their invitations diligently criticized before being allowed in.

"Mister Potter!" Came a shout from his left, and he turned to a blinding flash of light as his picture was taken. Bernard Crocker stood with the camera in his hands as Harry blinked the light out of his eyes, "What do you think of Lord Slytherin's win?" He continued to shout over the rabble.
Harry had no desire to shout back, so he merely gave Bernard a thumbs-up and a smile before turning back to his wait. They were at the bottom of a set of stairs now and the people in front of the Selwyns were being given a critical eye before being allowed to enter.

Hermione's gloved hand shook slightly on Harry's arm. He put his own hand to cover it. "We’ll get in."

"It would be so embarrassing to get kicked out in front of all these people." She hissed through her teeth as they approached the guards.

"Invitation."

Harry stood up straight, "I was personally invited by Lord Slytherin to this event."

The guard gave him a critical look, "Good for you. I need to still see your invitation."

"He didn't give me one."

"Are you sure about that?"

"Yes."

"Then you cannot enter."

"I'm Harry Potter. He and I are dating. He'd be pretty cross if I wasn't allowed in to see him."

"How do I know you're Harry Potter and not an assassin in disguise as Harry Potter ready to assassinate his Lordship?"

Harry blinked, "But-- but-- I'm not."

"Exactly what an assassin would say. I can't let you in without an invitation just in case Harry Potter did receive an invitation, but you missed it while nicking his hair for polyjuice. His lordship's safety is more than my job is worth."

Harry and Hermione gaped in unison.

“Look, I’m Harry Potter. I am involved with Lord Slytherin. I’ve been in the paper for it! How could someone polyjuice me? I've been at Hogwarts for the past month!"

“No invitation, no entry."

Harry groaned and was prepared to work at finding another entrance when a voice spoke up behind him, “Let them in. They are my guests.”

The man who had been behind them stepped forward, and Harry paid a bit more attention to him; white hair, white eyes and a white cane.

The air was pulled out of his lungs and his heart plummeted as he realized who it was. He had only seen him from a few old newspaper clippings, but this was apparently the mastermind of Tom’s rise to power. The blind spider with a web of information.

Avery.

“But they don’t have invitations, Sir.” The dumb guard said.
“They are my guests as of now.” Avery said and put a hand on each of their shoulders, his cane resting on Harry’s spine, “I will ensure their good behaviour.” With a small push, Avery guided them through the door and into the party proper.

Hermione’s brow furrowed, trying to identify who the man was and why he would help. Harry squeezed her hand, hoping to reassure her.

He doubted that it worked.

Avery smiled, his unseeing eyes seemingly settling on Harry, "Why don't you go and check the robes, Miss Granger. I wish to speak to young Harry for a moment."

He didn’t see the frown on her face, but he knew it was there as she took Harry’s robe and left for the robe check.

Probably cursing pureblood men who thought they controlled the world.

Chills shot straight up Harry’s spine as the man guided him further into the party, his hand on the base of his spine, and then into a side alcove, "It’s a pleasure to finally meet you, Harry. May I call you Harry?"

Harry nodded mutely before remembering, "Er-- yes. You can. How can I help you, Lord Avery?"

Avery smiled, "I didn't expect you to know who I am. I am but a minor member of the Sacred 27."

"All members of the Sacred 27 are equal, my lord."

"If you say so. Now, Harry. I have heard that you have a talent for secrets. I am intrigued by this," Avery pressed something into Harry's hand, "I won't be able to speak to you again tonight, but consider that a standing invitation to meet with me at my home. I wish to offer you an... apprenticeship of sorts." And with that Avery was gone into the crowd.

Harry’s hand shook slightly.

The painting was going to flip. He was going to absolutely flip his shit. He couldn't tell if this was good or bad but it was progress of sorts.

Numbly, he made his way through the crowd and to the coat check hoping to find Hermione.

She wasn’t there.

It took several scans of the crowd before he realized that she was only ten feet away and that he had not recognized her. He had never seen her wear something truly feminine as the white dress she now wore; a gold embroidered peacock crawled up the skirt and into the bodice, white flowers were stitched into the tulle that floated an inch away from the skirt. She looked absolutely stunning.

There were more people who clearly felt the same as they looked at her and smiled. Inspecting her as she attempted to make herself look small, her hands clasped together.

Harry smiled at her and held out his hand, "Hermione, I didn't know you were coming here to find a husband." He said jokingly.

She slapped his hand lightly but took his hand, allowing him to lead her away from the door and further into the party, "I did not!"

He chuckled at her coy smile, "I know you didn't. You just look really, really, really pretty. I don't
even want to ask how much that dress cost."

Hermione sniffed, as haughty as any pureblood woman, "It cost nothing. It belonged to my mother."

"Ah, your mum has good taste."

They walked through a set of double doors into a proper ballroom, and her grip tightened on his arm, it was white and gold, and a glittering crystal chandelier reflected spots of light all through the room, bathing them in a set flickering light. "I don't know why I decided to come here. Well, I know why I decided to come here but now that I'm here I don't know what to do."

Hermione was a confident woman but even in the face of the elite and powerful, her nerves were beginning to get the best of her. "Mingle? Make connections?"

"Make connections? They all hate my kind." She scoffed, eyeing the people eyeing her.

The gazes that were on her weren’t hate filled or predatory, more appraising or appreciative. "Not everyone hates muggleborns."

A dainty snort escaped her as she put her hands on her hips and took in the room with a more critical eye. Harry certainly hoped that they would be able to make it through the night without anyone being hexed.

"Granger?" A high-pitched voice rang out from their left. Draco stood with his jaw practically on the floor and his eyes wide as possible.

"Oh, hi Draco," Harry waved him over, "Anyone else around that we know?"

Hermione was staring at Draco like he was a slug. Draco was a slug, but Harry was fond of this slug. He was an agreeable slug.

Draco still looked gobsmacked at Hermione and stuttered, "P-Pansy and Theo are here and Smith is and- this is Granger right?"

"Would you like a scathing analysis of why everything about you is obnoxious?" She asked bitterly and turned away to look around the room.

The fact that Draco had a crush on Hermione and showed it by being a piece of trash was his own business, but it would be nice Draco just came out and asked her out and let her turn him down. It was the only way he would get over her.

The thought that Hermione would say yes was so unlikely that Harry didn’t even consider it.

"Oh, yes, that is indeed her. Well, you clean up nicely." Draco muttered, his cheeks flushing. He turned on heel, ready to scarper off when Harry grabbed the back of his robes.

"Nu-uh, have you seen Lord Slytherin?"

Draco’s throat pressed into the high collar of his robes and he gagged briefly, before nodding and pointing further back into the palace. "Near the veranda." He answered before escaping into the crowd.

Harry looked around the crowd before turning to Hermione, "Can you handle yourself?"

She raised a sculpted brow, "Can you?"
"I'll take that as a yes." He replied and left her in the crowd, making his way further into the palace, past the dancing, the musicians, the food -oh Merlin, that smelled amazing- and into a throng of people near the veranda (where he and Tom had first kissed)

Was this what it was like in France before the revolution? They probably still had a bit to go before that kind of ridiculous extravagance took place. He doubted Tom would allow anyone to let meetings happen when he was still in bed.

He approached the crowd and weaved into it until he found someone he recognized, which happened to be Regulus. "Hey, please tell me that he's in the centre of all this?"

Regulus' eyebrows travelled up, and his mouth formed a small “o” as he saw him, having clearly not expected Harry to be present, "Um- yes. He is. What are you doing here?"

"It's a party? I'll come if I want to?"

"Oh. Of course. Where there's a will..." Regulus muttered, almost distractedly.

Harry tried to ignore Regulus and how he was acting odd. How he had been acting odd for a long while, ever since he had seen him in Knockturn Alley with that vase, "Indeed. Is it going to be like this all night?"

Regulus shrugged, "Doubt it. He's been holding this little court for the past hour but I know he has things to do. People to talk with outside of these sycophants."

A few people who were eavesdropping shot Regulus dirty looks before turning back the centre of the crowd.

Harry left Regulus alone and pressed his way further inward, elbowing freely and maliciously. Someone elbowed him back, another kicked him and a third pushed him.

Pushed him hard enough that he tumbled out of the crowd and onto Tom's feet.

Harry was on his hands and knees looking up at Tom, who was seated with a glass of something – wine?-- in his hand.

Tom’s smirk was lewd and effervescent. He licked his lips at the sight, "Well, I must say, this is the first time I've had someone greet me by kneeling. I could get used to it."

"Probably, not the first time he's been on his hands and knees for him." Came a grating low-pitched, faux-whisper as he climbed to his feet. He recognized that voice.

Zacharias Smith.

He took a page from the youngest Weasley's book and shot a silent bat-bogey hex at Smith once he located him in the crowd.

There was a scream and he was rushing out of the crowd, holding his nose and squealing. That hex seemed harmless, but it was nasty; feeling little booger bats crawling around in the back of your nose and throat was just wrong .

Harry turned to Tom and brushed off his robes, hoping that he didn’t look like the dork who had tripped but the cool cat that had just hexed an asshole.

Tom appraised him with a lazy smile, his eyes only on Harry, "I guess we should be happy that it
was not something more serious." He looked at the group of courtiers and lazily flicked his hand at them. "Go away."

The group dissolved, shuffling towards the party, but many remained within 30 feet of them. It was like he and Tom had the plague, and they were watching. Listening.

Tom climbed to his feet, the glass of -Harry could smell it now- firewhiskey, swirled about, splashing onto the ground. "Let us find someplace else to talk. I wish to speak to you." Tom wrapped his arm around Harry and they sauntered off onto the veranda, into the wintry night air, just like when they had first kissed.

The smell of alcohol was strong on Tom and his cheeks were rosy with it. Harry had never seen him drunk or even buzzed before. Usually, it was Harry that was drunk and being irrational, but right now Tom’s hands were travelling up and down Harry’s arse and his face was nuzzled into his neck.

Had he been celebrating the win a bit too hard instead of keeping his wits about him?

It was concerning to see Tom like so.

There were a few shouts from the crowd below, Tom guided him over and gave them a lazy wave before continuing to a different door down the veranda. It was a French-paned door that opened at the slightest touch of Tom’s hand.

The room was dark until Tom flicked his wrist, causing it to come alight. Candles flared up, so many candles all over every flat surface.

Except for on the couch. The very big, comfy looking couch.

Oh boy.

The door closed with a click, and Tom was flush against Harry, pressed into his back, “I didn’t expect to see you tonight Harry.” Tom dropped the glass on the table just inside the door, the firewhiskey sloshing out of the glass. “Shouldn’t you be locked away at school? Away from my touch?” Tom was still holding him close but his free hand, newly divested of the firewhiskey, was playing with the front of Harry’s robes, “Red robes hmmm? Being brave like a naughty Gryffindor?”

Harry could feel something that was not Tom’s wand pressed up against him, “I thought I would match your eyes.”

Tom smiled, much wider than Harry had ever seen on his face, “That is awfully kind of you,” He kissed Harry then, his lips burning with alcohol.

Harry returned it eagerly before breaking away, “Are you drunk?”

Tom licked his lips and smirked, “I might be slightly buzzed.”

“I can’t believe you would give up control like this.” Harry kissed Tom’s neck, his hands fanning across his chest.

“You’re one to talk. The way you get drunk it’s amazing you haven’t been buggered.”

Harry flushed slightly, and ignored the implication, “May I ask why you’re buzzed? I don’t think I’ve ever seen you like this.”

“Harry. Harry, dearest.” He kissed the top of Harry’s head, “I am the future king of magical Britain.
Years of work have finally come to fruition, and... and... and now I have to deal with all of these fucking idiots."

Harry did his best not to laugh and guided Tom to the divan and laid him out on it, “How about you sober up a bit. Imagine if Rita Skeeter got a picture of you vomiting on Lucius’ shoes.”

Tom laughed, it was rich and hearty and went on for longer than Harry would have thought.

He loved it. He had never heard Tom sound so cheerful.

“He would deserve it. Arrogant toe-rag that he is.” He reached up and pulled Harry onto him so that he was straddling Tom. “Let’s not talk about obnoxious people. Tell me about what brought you to me. Tell me about... things.” Tom’s hand spun in circles in the air as Harry struggled to sit in a slightly dignified position.

With a small smile, Harry told him of how he and Hermione had snuck out of the castle and managed to get inside. He didn’t mention Avery by name, just that an older man had got him into the event.

“You brought your beloved Hermione here? I hope she will be able to tolerate it. Given her opinions and headstrong nature,” Tom’s eyes closed for a moment, “I am meeting her in Hogsmeade soon aren’t I? That shall be fun.”

“Will it? I think she wants to rip you a new asshole.”

“I’d like to see her try. I doubt she even knows the basic of dark curses.”

“I meant verbally.”

Tom snorted, “As if a schoolgirl could do that. I’m over seventy now. Silly child.”

Harry’s finger twirled around a coif of Tom’s hair, enjoying the silky softness of it, “Hermione may surprise you, but yes, I don’t think it’s anything that you won’t be able to withstand.”

“Maybe I’ll invite her to be part of... the latter process of my reign.”

Harry frowned, “I don’t know if she’ll be able to handle the requirements of it. What needs to be done. She has a soft heart.”

“Then I will obliviate her and that will be it.” Tom’s wand emerged from his sleeve and he locked the door and the curtains fell in front of the window, only leaving a sliver of the outside night visible. “Harry?”

He turned to him, Tom’s red eyes were hungry, “Yes, your majesty?”

“Kiss me.”

Harry kissed him.

“Worship me.”

Harry, with hands shaking, began to undo Tom’s robes, revealing his pale, lean chest that he wished he was more familiar with. The little scars that were on it. The rune etched into his skin, below his ribcage that he had never noticed before.

Tom watched him, lust in his heavily lidded eyes. Harry tried not to be intimidated. It wasn't like it
was their first time.

Harry smirked and deftly undid Tom's trousers. He slid his hand inside and grasp Tom's length, enjoying the feel of its firmness in his grip and the softness of his flesh. He stroked him briefly, watching as Tom let his head fall back and his eyes flutter shut at his ministrations.

Pulling Tom's trousers down and his cock out, Harry lowered himself between Tom's legs and worshipped him. Worshiped his prick. Each lick, each bob of his head was an act of devotion to itself. Every time swallowed him, with Tom pressing against the back of throat.

In this moment and every moment after he worshipped Tom.

There was a hand on the top of his head, and he paused, looking at him. There was so much more in his gaze, want and desire.

Harry knew what they both needed.

His throat felt dry, despite that he had just been doing, but Harry slid off of Tom and let his robes fall to the floor, stripping completely in the dim candlelight.

Tom hadn't moved, just laid there, waiting for Harry.

With a small grin, Harry stripped Tom's lower half down completely, leaving him with only his undone shirt and robes. A perfect specimen of haughty royalty, heavily lidded red eyes, and a glass of firewhiskey in his hand. A throne would suit him well, like he was born to the role, or moulded for it. The candlelight painted him in a chiaroscuro of resplendence and Harry was once again shocked that he was the one privileged enough to see him, to experience him like this.

Harry climbed on top of the divan, on top of Tom. There was almost a comfort of him being fully situated on his lap, feeling Tom's shaft pressed against his arse. It was a promise of what was to come.

He leaned forward and cupped Tom's cheek, his thumb stroking his cheekbone.

There was a desire, a need to tell him he was beautiful, that he was divine, that he was worth worshipping now and forever.

But he didn't. He couldn't.

Tom already knew this. He knew he was beautiful, he knew he was divine, he knew he deserved to be worshipped, he knew he was a genius.

Tom knew everything already, so there was no point in reiterating them.

He bucked up against Harry, a small grin on his full lips and whispered, "Be mine." He pulled Harry down into a kiss with one hand and began to slowly press a finger into him, stretching him, pressing into him.

Harry rocked on his fingers, enjoying the feeling that it was Tom that was inside of him.

He withdrew them, leaving Harry feeling hollow, but it was quickly replaced with Tom's well-lubricated prick, pressing up against his prostate. He began to rock again on him, not riding him, not quite yet, but enjoying the
fullness that Tom provided.

It was different from their previous times, those times had been almost frantic and rough, unexpected, but also completely delightful.

But this?

This was tender. Sensual.

Harry rode him, rode him slowly, his arms back and gripping Tom's legs as he lifted himself off and slid down to his base. Again and again and again.

Tom's grip was on Harry's thighs, his thumbs brushing near his groin but not quite touching it.

It was a gentle teasing. One that left him wanting more, but not needing it. He hungered for more of Tom's... everything, but he was content with having the privilege of Tom's cock within him. Everything else could wait for now.

His focus was on Tom and pleasing him.

Harry clenched around Tom, causing the older man to buck up at the sudden sensation. Harry enjoyed it and continued on him, hard.

Harry's prick was gripped, and Tom began to pump it in rhythm with Harry, but it wasn't long before they grew a bit more frantic as Tom began to pant and thrust up, taking control of the movements.

Tom released a string of hisses, his hands releasing his cock and gripping his hips as he released within Harry, filling him.

Tom laid there for a moment, still inside Harry.

Harry smirked at Tom's full body shudder, but soon Tom's hands were back on his cock, pumping it slowly.

Their gazes connected, and Harry smiled.

They both loved this.

It was something else this time. Something more.

He bucked his hips into Tom's hands. He was close to completion, oh so close, with Tom still inside him and his hands pumping away.

He leaned forward and kissed Tom as he came, his seed shooting thick ropes onto the future king's chest. Harry held himself up with one hand and slowly separated from Tom, pressing up against his side.

Tom vanished the remains of their encounter and held him close.

Harry laid comfortably in Tom’s arms, the quiet noise of people passing by outside almost lulling him into a sleep.

“I’ve never felt for someone as I do you. I didn’t think I was capable of it.” Tom’s voice was a near whisper and Harry wasn’t sure if he was supposed to hear it, “I thought that I was too fractured and fragmented to ever care for someone. To ever love someone, but when I’m with you. . . I feel whole.”
Harry sat up and inched towards Tom’s face before kissing him slowly, tenderly, “I think I understand what you mean.” Harry whispered, “All I think about is you. Helping you. Protecting you. Loving you. All I want is to be with you.”

Tom’s fingers brushed through Harry’s freshly tangled mess, “I don’t think you can understand what I mean, fully, but thank you.”

Harry pondered his words but couldn’t determine their exact meaning. Maybe it had to do with Tom being much, much, much older than him. Age and wisdom and all that.

Tom groaned slightly, “I guess I should go out and talk with people. Again.” He said it with such loathing and vitriol that Harry was almost afraid the paint was going to peel off the walls.

“It’s part of being King though.”

Tom nodded, “I’m just going to miss a quiet night in. Maybe I’ll start it off with a string of executions… or if anyone disturbs my dinner they will get a dose of the Cruciatus.”

Harry raised a brow, “That’s illegal though.”

“I’ll make it not illegal. For me only.” He said with a grin as he slid off the divan and began dressing.

Harry appreciated the view he got, enjoying the sight of Tom’s semi-nude body, how his muscles moved, the hint of how fit his thighs were through his pants, and the way the candlelight flickered off of him, throwing his features into a stark relief.

He was a work of art.

“Get dressed. We have people to meet. We need to talk to Barty about Skeeter.”

Chapter End Notes

Okay, so this one took a bit of time because I rewrote the beginning twice, changed it completely again and restructured it then after that.

I also recently started dabbling in a GanonLink fic and it made me realize that while I do push myself to get 10k chapters lately that it's negatively effecting my writing, so I'm going to aim for 5-6k chapters now which should ensure a more timely chapter upload instead of 1.5 months which I do not want to do.

But given some irl stuff that I have to do, and a gift project that I'm a part of there is a chance that the next chapter will be about a month but hopefully it won't take that long.

Anyways, I want to thank everyone who leaves kudos and comments and my readers. You guys are all so sweet and important to me and I love you all so much.
Chapter 22

Whale, whale, whale… What is this? A new chapter? From me? Freaking WILD. It’s been so long I don’t even know if I remember how to write. Who am I? Who are you?

ANYWAYS, sorry for the disgustingly long delay. Real life shit is real life and shit and just ugh, you know what I am saying? Took that nice long break to collab and work on In the Dark of the Night with some amazing people and needed some time to recuperate from that. (I hope you enjoyed it if you read it)

I need to thank nani/nanimok like so much. She beta’d this chapter for me and is just like so amazing. like i said i would suck your dick in the AN nani but that's a lie. i will do so much more than that. Nani? will you be my sister from another mister? i'm adopting myself into your family and now we're siblings.

Previously on WWA…

Tom Riddle has been elected King of Wizarding Britain (elected king, pfft this is not a democratic boyband, what AU are we in? Oh yeah.) and is now partying it up like the slutty, slutty dark lord he is.

Crouch Jr. has murdered Crouch Sr. and maimed Frank Longbottom.

Snape poisoned Dumbledore with ricin and he has been ding dong dead for a while.

Amelia Bones is having none of this though! She has recruited James Potter into investigating the corruption that is within the ministry and the Sacred 28 and just the entirety of Lord Slytherin’s life and boy howdy is James determined to root it, but then he doesn’t want to take his only son down so what will he do!?

Bellatrix has got Rita in her sights but she has not quite managed to figure out the problem… yet. Maybe she will who knows.

Hermione, with the assistance of Harry, has broken out of Hogwarts and is attending the celebratory party with Harry and she is more than willing to give Lord Slytherin a piece of her mind.

Ulysses Nott continues to be a stereotypical, poorly written bad guy that the author thought up quickly to create tension. Octavius Flint continues to be an underdeveloped stockbroker type of character that has no care for morals and is buying all the house elves for either nefarious purposes or he wants to start a house elf porn studio.

Our runaway feature, of course, is Augustus Avery. Blind, but can see much farther than anyone else. He’s got his finger on the pulse and an angiogram line up into the heart of the issue. Cool, calm, collected and a silver fox he has begun to show interest in Harry and has invited him over for fun times dishing info.

And lurking back at Tom’s house and Harry’s dresser drawer is paintingmort who is so lonely and bored and a bit of a psychopath. He’ll be back to yell at Harry and slap him
also, there will be a brief mention of ursula st. clair. yeah, you know her! the totally important character mentioned like a year ago? i know you totally remember that but, just in case, she’s the vampire lawyer that told the wizengamot that they can’t interfere with the sacred 28.

see the end of the chapter for more notes.

the room was quieter and smaller than the grand hall downstairs. within was a significant number of lord slytherin’s closest supporters. harry thanked merlin and morgana and circe and all of the great witches and wizards of history for the lack of bellatrix lestrange, as he was not willing to deal with her tonight. with tom having been inebriated earlier, it would be better for harry to keep hold of his wits. so no alcohol for him, no matter how many wistful looks he threw at the wine.

in the corner of his eye, he saw barty crouch speaking to an unimpressed livia zabini, and harry wondered if blaise knew his mother was in tom’s inner circle. not that he would be able to tell; it was blaise. cool, collected, and calculating blaise. he played everything close to the chest and if anyone could keep a secret.

people bowed to tom as they swept approached crouch and zabini. harry just kept his eyes forward and tried not to think about his last encounter with crouch, and how tom had caught them meeting up to discuss him—tom—which was a bit awkward, to say the least.

he hoped that crouch hadn’t gotten in too much trouble for agreeing to meet harry. it wasn’t like tom and barty had the same relationship that harry and tom had. although, harry suspected, crouch wouldn’t mind getting dicked down by tom in a sleazy hog’s head room.

zabini curtsied and crouch bowed, his eyes shining with delight at lord slytherin. as he turned to harry his grin grew a fraction wider; delight at seeing harry?

harry’s step nearly faltered at the expression.

"your majesty, i was pleased to hear the announcement of your victory. it is an honour to be one of your subjects," crouch said, “though i was more than willing to continue to be one if you hadn’t won.”

zabini raised her champagne flute. "to your victory, my lord."

tom inclined his head a fraction before raising the glass of wine he had been nursing. "thank you both. livia, dear, if you don’t mind, i need a moment to speak to lord crouch."

zabini nodded and left, her dress sweeping the floor behind her as she joined lucius and narcissa.

tom erected a privacy bubble around them.

"how may i serve?" crouch's eyes lingered on harry for a moment longer than either he or tom was comfortable with.

tom put his hand on harry’s lower back. "we need to discuss bellatrix."

harry listened as tom detailed to crouch what bellatrix had uncovered regarding skeeter and her photographer. he noticed how tom had failed to answer how skeeter was able to get her
“Bella will be entering the Daily Prophet tonight to root out Rita’s source. They have an information bank that contains memories they can use for verification. If she fails to get into the vault, you will be taking over for her,” Tom said, sliding his free hand around Harry’s back to rest it on his hip, possessively.

Harry chuckled internally at Tom’s little show of dominance, but Crouch’s expression didn’t falter a bit. It didn’t change into a look of jealousy or anger, anything of the sort, instead he smiled happily. “I will happily undertake it if you will it so,” Crouch said.

“What if Skeeter had a wiretap or something like that?” Harry asked.

He received two confused looks instead of an answer, and Harry refrained from looking smug. Knowing something that Tom didn’t was a definite treat.

“Wiretaps?”

“It’s something the muggles do, you see them in spy films and stuff all the time—what? Why are you looking at me like that?”

“You watch muggle spy movies?” Tom asked, and the only way Harry could describe his expression was “bemused.”

“My dad does,” Harry said quickly, he didn’t want to get in trouble for doing muggle things at this very, very, very, pureblood event, even if they were the only three speaking at the moment. “Action films, you know? America versus Russia and stuff like that,” Harry defended, before bracing himself because he knew the ramble was going to start and now there was no stopping it.

“His favourite is Die Hard and it has these German guys holding a tower hostage but they’re actually there to steal stuff from a vault, and it’s all a ruse cause they’re pretending to be terrorists and stuff. The main bad guy is this British bloke and at one point he’s playing German, pretending to be an American and it makes my dad laugh hearing that nasal sort of tone when he does?” Harry said. “I swear my mom has a crush on him, she actually sits down to watch it all the way through each time, I think it’s his hair. Very fluffy.”

Tom and Barty blinked and then looked at one another before Tom spoke, “What does this have to do with Skeeter?”

“Well, in movies like that if you have the right technology and a power source you can just hook it up and it will transmit the information to something like a tape recorder. So, she could have gotten into Eglington Hall somehow and planted it before the mee— Oh, wait, that wouldn’t work because that time after the Wizengamot session was just down a hallway and wasn’t planned... it wouldn’t make sense for her to be bugging random hallways in the Ministry...”

“Wouldn’t the magic would interfere with the technology?” asked Barty.

Harry shrugged. “As far as I am aware they’re just a microphone, a power source and whatever the recording device is, but that’s not relevant. It can’t be that.” Harry turned to Tom. “So, that’s what Bellatrix is looking to find out?”

Tom nodded.

“With Rita soon to be dealt with it will be just a few people left and everything will fall into place,” Crouch mused, a deranged smile plastered across his face.
"Ho— how many are left?" Harry asked.

"Dumbledore and my father were the strongest opponents to his ascension and now, Skeeter has marked herself as an opposition," Tom said. "Ideally, we could get her on our side but I suspect that at this point she just likes stirring the pot. There are a few dissenters that remain in the Ministry. They can either submit to the new status quo, or they can be silenced with force, or money. It will all depend on who is pliable and who will be snapped."

Harry licked his lips, and looked towards the crowd for a long moment before turning back to Crouch. "Did... did it upset you? Killing your father?"

"No," Barty’s brows furrowed, "how did you know it was me?"

"I... I overheard you and Lord Slytherin discussing it a while ago... when he assigned the job to you," Harry stuttered.

Tom knew this of course, but Harry didn’t want Crouch upset at him. The man was just a little unbalanced.

Crouch laughed. "The talent of Skeeter but the discretion of a Slytherin." He winked at Lord Slytherin. "He’s certainly one to have on our side."

Tom nodded, his lips pressed together in a thin line. "He is impressive."

Harry flustered and the room suddenly seems stifling.

He did not need to be looked at like that.

Not by both of them.

Crouch, thankfully, decided that this was a good moment to change the subject, which relieved the pressure a bit. "May I inquire about how we got Burke, Ollivander, Selwyn and Slughorn? I was under the impression that Burke sold his vote, and the others have always voted in line with what Dumbledore was preaching."

"It’s as simple a fact that Dumbledore died and Burke didn’t get paid upfront. Suddenly, he was searching for money and there I was with a mere 500 galleons." Tom laughed. "The others thankfully were able to tell which was the wind was blowing. It was best for them to side with us and be in my good graces once I have ascended the throne. There was nothing they could do to prevent my rise."

Crouch smiled. "To have won by an even wider margin than we had been expecting? It firmly cements your win and they won't be able to call for a revote. Most fortunate."

The three of them paused as a blob of darkness approached. The dour look, large nose, and the general appearance of being a giant bat—it was Severus Snape.

Tom flicked his wand, allowing him entrance into the conversation, "I am continually impressed at your ability to get into places you have no invitations to." Tom’s voice wasn’t angry or upset, but amused, "I think I shall have to have you whip the security into shape."

"An interesting thought," Snape said, bowing a mere fraction of an inch to Tom. There was no “My Lord” or “Your Majesty” attached to Snape’s words. Barely a glint of recognition to Tom’s new rank and neither of them seemed to care.
"That is if we can free you from that job at Hogwarts."

"I suspect that McGonagall will not honour Dumbledore's wish to have me at the school. James Potter is currently a persona non grata at the Ministry right now, maybe they will seek him out to take the position. He is apparently much more desirable." Snape’s bottom lip twitched into a sneer, before turning back to his regular unimpressed look.

It was Harry’s turn to be confused. “My father is out of favour?”

Snape smirked. "Oh? Haven't you heard? Apparently, your father is only part-time in the Auror department and his last investigation, Crouch Sr.'s murder, has been swept under the carpet."

"You didn’t know?" Tom looked at Harry, concern etched across his face. It clearly wasn’t about how Harry felt but that fact that Harry didn’t know what was happening with his family.

Harry’s mind drifted to the letter his father had sent him and how he hadn’t responded. "No. We haven't spoken much recently… He might not trust me with that kind of information at this point.” Harry bit his lower lip. “I think I will try to talk to him later about it.”

This was not good. The rift between James and him had grown wider than Harry could ever recall and Harry hadn’t realised.

They stood in silence before Barty broke it with his typical candour.

“What a fine day,” Barty declared. “We all have discovered something new in our lives. A great way to begin a reign; uncovered some unsavoury truth’s, deaths that have changed the world, and soon, planning the future censureship of the media. We are off to an amazing start.” He raised a glass and toasted Tom. “May all future assassinations go as smoothly as the passing of my father and Dumbledore. And may all future truths harm our enemies.”

Crouch tossed the drink back before bowing to Tom and leaving the room.

Harry shook his head. Snape and Tom didn’t seem to notice or care. Harry hoped there would be no more deaths, and that Crouch Sr. and Dumbledore were the only ones that were needed for a revolution. Was his father going to be on the list? If he worked at Hogwarts, surely he would be safe there...

“There won’t be many more deaths Harry. It will be fine. We have the Sacred 27, and the Wizengamot can be bought just as easily,” Tom said, as if he had read Harry’s mi—Oh, yeah. He can do that.

“I just don’t want my father to get hurt.”

Snape snorted and looked away.

“He won’t,” Tom assured him. “I promised you that no one you care for would get hurt. Even if he’s on the opposite side, there are ways to ensure that he won’t be in the way. We know he wouldn’t hurt you and he knows that hurting me will hurt you. He will know his place by the time this is over.”

“As your servant,” Harry said with a half-hearted smile.

“As your father.”

Harry’s lips parted slightly. With talk of assassinations he had forgotten that Tom actually had a soft
side to him, one that was interested in Harry’s well-being. Telling the two of them apart, the two sides of Tom, was difficult; there was the cold calculated Lord Thomas Slytherin and then there was Tom and Harry knew that he needed to reconcile them into the same being in his mind. That it wasn’t one or the other but the same person.

“Oh,” was Harry’s oh so glib reply.

Tom chuckled and patted Harry’s cheek before looking past Harry’s head. “You have a visitor.”

The privacy spell that surrounded him released, and Tom stepped back. Hermione was rushing to him, her dress lifted to avoid tripping on the hem. Her smile was nearly ear to ear.

“Harry! Harry! You won’t believe what happened!”

She pulled him into a hug and spun him around, nearly dipping him.

Harry laughed, and gripped her shoulders. She was practically vibrating with excitement. “What happened? Did Draco fall down a well?”

“No! I met Ursula St. Clair and we got to talking. She wants me as an intern right after I graduate! She’ll have her firm pay for any further education that I need!” She continued to bounce under his grasp, “I’m going to have a job with the biggest magical law firm in England!”

Her smile was contagious, and Harry felt his own face cracking into a grin. “And here I thought you didn’t want to go into magical law,” he teased her.

Her smile faded just the smallest bit, “You know how hard it can be for Muggle-borns to find jobs after Hogwarts. . . Your mum told me she was unemployed for a few years after graduating, and she’s pretty amazing, if I may say so. And I’ve been worried about finding employment once I graduate and the fact that I have a job offer from her? She’s been practicing magical law for centuries.”

“Not afraid that she will turn you into a vampire?”

She snorted. “I doubt it, but it won’t be an issue if I have to give up garlic.”

“Well, congratulations!” He gave her a tight hug.

She squeezed him back. “This is so exciting Harry! I am going to be able to make real changes! The real impact that affects our society is made through the policies and laws instilled, and I will finally be able to contribute or—one day—even make policies of my own! We’ll be able to hold people accountable, help those who need it, generally help our society in the best of ways! I want the next generation of muggle-borns to feel a positive effect from what I will be working on. Morgana, this is so exciting!”

Harry truly was happy for her. Everything was beginning to work out for Hermione and him. Tom had been elected King, and had confessed some rather important feelings. Avery had approached him which meant that Harry would finally be able to shut the painting up and help Tom with the people that were pushing his buttons, and now Hermione had a job offer with a prestigious law firm and Tom was willing to consider bringing her into the fold.

The only thing left now was for his father to see the light.

Harry looked over his shoulder for Tom but the man wasn’t there. He had seemingly vanished when Hermione had approached.
“Lucius Malfoy came and got him,” Hermione answered, “I think he’s downstairs to the more populated section…” She was looking around at the people in the room for the first time. Members of the Sacred 27 and the other members of his inner circle. Some high ranking and others who were so indescribable that they were able to blend into the background.

Except Snape.

He loomed, but not like a loom, but more of a superhero who’s whole schtick was making people afraid.

There were several groups looking at the two of them with an appraising, if disturbed, gaze. Even if he was Lord Slytherin’s paramour it didn’t mean he was free of dealing with irritated purebloods. “I think we should go there too,” Harry said as took her hand and lead her to the stairs.

As they approached the top stair, a firm hand gripped Harry’s shoulder.

Snape stood there, his dark eyes piercing into him. Harry looked down, thinking of the painting telling him to avoid eye contact with a legilmens.

“Yes?”

Snape stared down at the two of them. Something indecipherable passing over his face before he spoke, “If you leave because of what you are and what they are, they win.”

Surprised, Harry looked into the room. “It’s not like there’s anything there for me. I was just going to go find Lord Slythe—”

He didn’t get to finish his sentence since Snape had turned on his heel and was returning to the room.

“...What just happened?”

“Who was that?” Hermione asked, her head cocked to the side as she watched Snape loom over a group.

“Severus Snape. He’s a friend of my mum.”

“Is he a muggle-born?” Hermione had turned back around and was heading down the stairs, guiding Harry with her hand in his.

“Er, half-blood, I think. Why?”

“I think he wants you to annoy the purebloods by existing.”

“I already do that, but you do it better.”

“I do everything better than you,” Hermione retorted.

“I doubt you’re a better kisser than him,” a new voice said. “But I guess if we wanted to be scientific I would have to snog you for a while. I hope you’re not opposed to it Harry. It’s for science after all. Empirical-based evidence and all that.”

If Harry had been drinking, whatever liquid would have been coming out of his nose.

Tom had been at the side of the stairs as they had descended, out of sight but able to hear their conversation. An empty wine glass was set on the table next to him and a half full one was in his hand.
It had only been a few minutes!

Hermione was staring blankly at Lord Slytherin, her mouth a perfect ‘o’. Was Tom afraid of crowds?

“Bloody hell, Thomas,” Harry said. “Stop zipping in and out like a ghost.”

“You must be the famous Hermione Granger,” Tom said, completely ignoring here. “Apologies for abandoning you up there but Lucius informed me that someone was getting handsy down here and I had to come down and spank them into submission. As a proper king must do since the guillotine has fallen out of favour.” Tom gave her a ridiculously charming smile and drained the glass like it was the night the Slytherin Quidditch team had won the cup.

“And then you found the wine cellar?” Harry asked.

“Three doors down from the kitchen, behind the painting of the goblin with cat ears,” Tom replied and turned back to Hermione, who had pulled herself together a bit more and was staring at him with a firm set to her jaw. “Congratulations are in order then? Ursula St. Clair doesn’t just take in anyone. She’s probably been keeping an eye on you since your O.W.L’s.”

Hermione’s glare faltered. “Those results are private. How would she—”

Tom’s grin was smug and arrogant, even to Harry’s eyes. “Now, Miss Granger, I wouldn’t want you to think the Ministry isn’t corrupt. You’re one of the smartest student’s coming out of Hogwarts this year and if you’re living in some idealized version of the world where the Ministry are the good guys and I’m the villain, you’re going to be in for a wake-up call.”

He walked over to them and was suddenly looming over Hermione. “I’m going to make it right, Hermione.”

“And what is it you’re going to make right?” she asked with a glower.

“I’ll start with making it so someone just can’t buy information. Like your opinions on how you think that the Sacred 27 should have their titles and lands stripped from them and given to those more deserving.”

Hermione’s face grew ashen. “That was just an opinion essay, it didn’t mean anything,” she whispered, her voice hoarse as she looked around the room, hoping no one was listening in.

“And what interesting opinions you have. I liked the part where you suggested that purebloods should not be able to marry other purebloods.”

Her fist clenched at her side. “Inbreeding is a serious problem with the purebloods. Look at Vincent Crabbe! Give him another generation or two and his descendants will have the Hapsburg Jaw!”

Tom looked away from them, towards the party. "You're strong-willed and opinionated. I admire that, but I wonder, briefly, How many of the pureblooded, endlessly affluent people know of what could be easily considered as radical opinions?, Miss Granger… How many of those with If I could advise you on anything in life, and I do hope you listen, it's to keep your cards close to your chest. I think you two should head back to the school soon. You don't need to be getting in trouble.”

Hermione seemed flabbergasted by the compliment.

Tom put the empty wine glass on the table next to the other. “It was nice seeing you so soon Harry.” Tom dipped his head and kissed Harry. He, unsurprisingly, tasted of wine.
“And it was a pleasure to meet you, Miss Granger,” Tom said, and shockingly, it sounded sincere. “Have a good night, the both of you.”

Little was known about the Prophet’s evidence vault—given some of their more egregious stories that were published, she had been skeptical that it even existed—but through an innocuous visit to one of the Prophet’s board members, it was confirmed that it did in fact exist, and it was lodged in an expanded vault in the chief editors office. The board member had complained for quite a while about the cost of purchasing and installing it twenty years ago. Everything he said had been noted down and thoroughly researched.

Bellatrix would not fail Lord Slytherin.

She had tracked down the company that had made the vault and imperiused one of the men who could break through the magical locks. The spell had been placed on him a three days ago, and he had been ordered to act normal, before apparating to a little hillside out in Devon to meet with her.

And now they strode down Diagon Alley wearing different faces. Bellatrix was a lithe man with grey hair, and her imperiused companion looked like a wizened old man with more wrinkles than a raisin.

Their destination was the side entrance of the Prophet, down a narrow, dirty alleyway with more grime than Sirius’s choice in friends. The door was nearly concealed in the darkness, and the only reason she found it was because the handle slammed into her hip as she walked past it.

With a slight bit of trepidation, she turned the handle and was rewarded by the door swinging open. The aforementioned board member had also complained about the side doors, and, which was the only reason she knew they were there. One imperiused and then obliviated intern, and the locking mechanism was jammed inside the door and the alarm system was deactivated.

A dimly lit hallway ahead and a staircase to the right greeted them, and they made their way inwards and upwards towards the bullpen.

The building was abandoned for the most part. The bullpen was a chaotic mess that was beginning to spill out of the large room and infiltrate the hallways, desks were pushed haphazardly together, chairs were strewn about with no sense. There was the tell-tale thump from the warehouse next door where the next day’s publication was being printed, but other than that it was empty.

She stepped fully into the bullpen and stumbled back. Parchment covered the room, the floor was coated in a slippery, shifting surface of it. It was pinned to the walls, and some had even made it to the ceiling. Hastily scribbled notes or well-documented treatises could be spotted everywhere. A butterfly, completely folded from paper, fluttered past Bellatrix as they made their way further into the chaos. She suspected that if she scraped back the papers and made it to the bottom of the floor, she would find some from when the Prophet was founded.

Around the bullpen were a series of small offices the size of her bathtub with the names of more prestigious reporters emblazoned on them, and above all of them was her target.

Up a set of metal stairs was the editor’s office. It was significantly larger than the rest, with a large window so the occupant could look and watch the reporters.

They ascended the metal stairs with their wands drawn and footsteps silenced.
She would be better than Snape or Crouch. She didn’t have anyone to kill (yet) but she would discover Skeeter’s secret for Lord Slytherin. She would be better than those bottom feeders. They weren’t worth his Lordship’s time but he had given them the greatest of missions. Killing Dumbledore and the Head of the Auror office… she could have done that.

In fact, Bellatrix could have done better.

A few red sparks shot from the tip of her wand as Bellatrix gripped the handle of the office and tested to see if it was unlocked. It was.

The room was dimly lit by a portable lantern that sat on the desk, and it’s poor light threw the room into stark contrast. The office was the antithesis of downstairs, it was tidy, not a paper in sight, completely immaculate.

The vault was behind the editor’s desk. A six foot by three foot high door that stuck out like a sore thumb. Bellatrix stepped behind the desk and looked at it. It was going to be a bitch to unlo—

She gaped.

It was open. An inch of space was between the vault door and the wall.

Her fingertip was all the weight needed to push the door outward and reveal the interior of the safe.

“Stand in the corner and make sure no one comes near me or the vault,” she ordered.

A quick nod and the man was in the corner of the room, where no one would see him. She closed the door until only a fraction of an inch was open.

What were they thinking having it on site instead of in Gringotts? Although, the Prophet was known to post inflammatory things about the goblins when subscriptions went down and the goblins were spiteful little bastards with long memories.

The interior was about 15 feet by 15 feet, but it seemed to go deeper, filled with filing cabinets.

“Point me to Skeeter.”

Her wand spun around on her hand before pointing left. She followed its point and pulled the drawer open. Inside were vials of memories on what seemed to be a conveyor of sorts. Bellatrix spun it to where the most recent articles were.

Bellatrix fingered through the memories until she spotted the vials with the article names in question printed across them in purple ink. A quick duplication spell of the vials and then some faux smoke filling them and she was done. The originals were in her pocket and the duplicates slotted into place.

Memories had not been her first thought when she had heard about the evidence vault, but it made the most amount of sense. What better way to prove you saw or heard something than to provide the memory of it?

Now, to deal with the pensieve problem. The only people she knew of having one was Lord Slytherin and her cousin, Regulus. His lordship wouldn’t be at home tonight, instead, he would be catering to his less devoted of followers at Kensington Palace.

She bit back a grin at the thought of him moving into the Palace and cementing himself truly as the King of Britain, but no, there was more to come after that. Regulus would likely be there as well, and she had a key to Grimmauld Place.
He wouldn’t notice if she swung over and used it.

There was a loud crack from outside the vault and she ran towards it, wand in hand. She pushed the vault door open and on the ground, blood spreading from a wound on his head, was the Editor in Chief of the Prophet.

Fuck.

Her useless, vault opening accomplice stood to the side, his wand drawn, but slack in his hand.

“What did you do?!” she almost screeched.

Bella lowered herself to the floor to see if the man was alive. His skull was broken open and brain matter was visible. There was a lot of blood.

If he was alive he wasn’t going to get better.

“You said to not let anyone approach you or the vault.”

“For Merlin’s sake!” she said. “I meant apprehend him or knock him out!”

This was not good. This was the opposite of good. This was bad. This was very bad. It was supposed to be a quick in and out job. No bodies. No evidence.

If he went missing on the night that Lord Slytherin won…

“In for a knut, in for a galleon,” she decided. Take him downstairs.”

She began to syphon up the blood with her wand, and tidied the room a bit and closed the vault door until it was open just a smidge.

Her helper stood at the bottom of the stairs with the body.

It took five, sweaty and uncomfortable minutes as Bellatrix moved the body into the perfect position to make it look like he had tripped and fallen down the stairs. A few well-placed kicks in certain spots to help with what would be known as the “unfortunate tumble” theory.

It was tempting to just smash his office lantern and set the room on fire, but she crushed that urge to cause chaos. Lord Slytherin and his success was more important than her bloodthirst. She needed to please him. She needed to show him that she was better than all the rest of his followers.

She cannot have this look like anything other than an accident.

Bellatrix lifted his head up and reapplied the syphoned blood, staining the floor and parchment red. Finally, she took the arm of her imperiused assistant and hurried out of the offices, leaving the body behind them.

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His lordship had made it clear that he didn’t trust Bellatrix to handle the matter. Barty had understood the hidden meaning in his words and had quickly left the party.

It was a good thing he had.

He stood over the carefully laid out body.
Bella had made quite the mess.

Their lordship had entrusted her to carry out this mission without leaving behind anything that could be traced to him. The scrutiny they would face, if caught, could potentially ruin all of Lord Slytherin’s plans for the future.

Barty entered the editor’s office and took the lantern on the desk.

He would admit that it wasn’t the most well thought out plan, but anyone with an ounce of common sense would look at the body and be skeptical. He had seen Bella’s weak kicks, but they wouldn’t have done enough damage.

Barty knew that one of the reasons he was so valuable to Lord Slytherin was because he was that he wasn’t a complete snob about wizard society. Wizards were better than muggles, that was without a doubt, but sometimes muggles had advantages to them. They knew things, clever things, and those things would eventually filter into the wizarding world.

Before his father had died he had heard the word “forensics” being tossed around and knew that some of the Aurors were starting to look past the constructed, superficial level of a crime scene. Yes, Barty had relied on that for his father’s murder but he had made sure to leave no evidence behind, on top of a suspect to take the fall. Bella on the other hand…

He spotted a bloody smear on the window to his right.

Bella was not the right person for this kind of job.

Too scattered. Too brain-addled.

His lordship was wise, he knew that Bella couldn’t be trusted. Only his most trusted would be able to clean up the mess she would make.

She might have had gotten the evidence needed to deal with Skeeter but, for now, Crouch would clean up the body. He would save the day and then he would meet with his lordship and tell him of how she almost ruined it all.

He gripped the lantern handle and smashed it onto the floor near the bottom of the stairs. The parchment caught quickly and fire began to spread out, engulfing the floor and then the walls. He watched from the doorway, the light flickering in his eyes as the flames ravaged the room.

His lordship would thank him for this.

Barty left the building and watched from the shadows of a doorway as the windows shattered from the heat, alarms began to screech and yells echoed out through the street. Workers in the printing division of the warehouse called for a fire drill. There was a very real danger of the entire area catching on fire if they didn't nip it in the bud, but… it would be amusing to watch it happen.

Merlin, he loved the chaos of it all.

No Prophet, meant no Skeeter. They would rebuild in time but it was likely a nail in the coffin. No one would take their place as a daily source of information.

Why bother with fixing a broken society when you could burn it down?
Her assistant had been obliviated, cleaned and sent on his merry little way back home. The polyjuice had worn off and all was well with Bellatrix, for the most part.

She pushed the door to Grimmauld place open with the tips of her fingers. The door swung inwards, no sound was made, as if the hinges had just been oiled.

No house elf greeted her, for which she was thankful. Regulus had probably volunteered the little gremlin to help at the party tonight. Ever the good little toady to his king.

She made her way to the library on the second floor. The pensieve had been in the family for a few generations, but the last person she knew of using it was Arcturus. He had shown it to her when she was small. It had been hidden in his secret study in the library.

It wasn’t really a secret room; everyone knew of it, but she remembered that no one ever really went near it, just that it was his special place.

Not much had changed about the library since the last time she had been here, except that Regulus had moved the chairs into a circle.

A library is for reading, not talking, ugh Regulus. So plebeian.

Not that Bellatrix actually used the Lestrange library.

The bookshelf that concealed Arcturus’ room stood in the back corner. Bellatrix remembered being disappointed that there was no magic to its concealment, just a switch on the side. Arcturus had told her that a powerful wizard would be able to sense magic concealments and therefore whatever was hidden wasn’t truly concealed. Sometimes, he said ruefully, a simple muggle-like trick was better for hiding things.

She slid her fingers down the side of the bookcase until she felt the edges of the latch and pushed it inwards, releasing the locking mechanism. The door swung open. Like the library, it hadn’t changed much since the last time she had seen it decades ago.

It was clean. Regulus either used it enough for the house elves to bother, or there was a dust repellant charm at work.

The pensieve stood in the corner, beckoning her.

It was empty, so there was no need to syphon out any old memories. The rest of the unit was not so, and old vials with Arcturus’s writing on them lined the top shelf. A bit lower down were several vials with loopy writing on it that she didn’t recognize, probably Melania’s.

She pulled the memories out of her pocket and poured the one labelled ‘Conclave in Chaos - Voting of the Sacred 28’ into the bowl and dove in.

Eglington Hall sprang into existence around her. It was much bigger and blurrier, than it normally is, nor could she leave the position that she was in which seemed sideways.

It didn’t make sense.

She watched through the memory and then watched through it again.

The memory was exchanged for the next, and then another.

Oh.
She pulled out her own memory of the Conclave and dropped it into the pensieve before diving in. Bellatrix watched herself as she took her spot in Eglington Hall, next to her husband, before going to the opposite side of the room, past her little brat of a nephew, and to the tapestry on the wall.

A piece of it crumbled to the ground, nearly hitting Muriel Prewett as the small beetle moved positions.

It even had markings like her glasses.

Bella laughed as she exited the memory and landed on the floor.

Rita wouldn't be bugging them anymore.

Chapter End Notes

AN: It’s not a mistake that Harry is saying wiretap instead of bug, It’s just a choice to allow him to be ignorant of a few things. Sometimes you remember words to the wrong thing, like forgetting that wiretap is for phones only.

Also, look up who played the villain of Die Hard if you didn't know who it was. ; )

But also, like for real. Thank you so much nani for betaing this for me.

Also, also, I'm started for on chapter 23. This bitch aint dead yet.
It was so early in the morning that it was still late at night, those twilight hours where early risers were still asleep and night owls had just gone to bed; this was the time for the insomniac’s and night workers, and as he was both of those, Tom was awake and taking notes.

He had catalogued his possessions and was now working to decide on which ones he would take with him to Kensington Palace in a week. The books in the library would stay in Riddle Manor, there would be too many people coming in and out of the Palace and he didn’t want to risk his books being stolen or, in the case of the very dark ones, discovered.

His potion cupboard would stay here as well for much the same reason.

It appeared the only things he would be taking would be his clothes, wand, and horcruxes.

Tom fiddled with his cuff links.

He had spent nearly half a century travelling the globe and accruing information, only to return to England with knowledge and little else. It was all he had truly desired from his journeys. Maybe he had hoped at the beginning to find a greater meaning to life, the universe and everything.

But he hadn’t.

His childhood beliefs had merely been reaffirmed. Death was around every corner and was to be avoided, and he used all he had learned to give death a wide berth.

Alas, significant downsides had been found in his avoidance of traversing the mortal coil.

Tom smiled at the mirror in front of him. He looked good now, and he had looked good in his old age. There was no denying that he had aged well and, despite the fear of an impending death, it had suited him.

Tom would always be comfortable in his own body, no matter his state, but reabsorbing the diary horcrux had brought to light some issues he hadn’t noticed.

The slight arthritis in his hands, the hunched shoulders, and the small click in his spine were gone. He moved without any twinges, and his hearing was better. Morgana’s tits, he could hear everything, especially high pitched sounds that could nearly drive him mad if he was forced to go into muggle London.

The increased and nearly ravenous libido was also a pleasant surprise. He didn't remember having nearly as much drive while at Hogwarts, but then again he has been so full of himself and his studies that he hadn't had time to focus on any sins of the flesh.

Not that he would have wanted to.

The choices at Hogwarts had been slim at the time, the only one close to his type had been the Divination Professor, a man with brown hair, soft eyes, and a kind smile. Tom had fancied him but his professor only cared for him as a teacher favoured a student. He didn't treat him as a prize like Slughorn had.
It had been a pleasant friendship, but years at the orphanage taught Tom that smiles were not to be trusted.

Harry reminded him a bit of the professor. Kind, but could seemingly see through him, and challenged him in many ways. The professor had challenged Tom's preconceived notions about time and his interpretation of events, and Harry had done the same, bringing his own point of view to Tom. Harry had fought him on matters of morality, of right and wrong.

Tom wouldn't like to admit that he was a little pleased that Harry was falling into line now with his ideals for a revolution, but part of him wondered if he would stop caring about Harry if he just became another one of his followers.

Was he only intrigued by him because Harry fought him?

Or was it because Tom got to take this boy with his definitions of morality and corrupt him into something of his own shaping?

Would he grow bored with Harry once he was done?

A knock at his bedroom door, "Enter."

His house elf entered, its head hung low, "Mistress Bellatrix is here with news. Master Crouch is also here but he said he is just here to annoy Mistress Bellatrix"

"Sounds par for the course," Tom slid his dress robe off, revealing a white dress shirt, and black vest and trousers, "Escort them to my office."

His elf nodded and vanished with a crack as Tom left the room and descended the stairs to his office. Their bickering was audible as they ascended the stairs. A muzzle would probably help Barty's interactions with Bellatrix.

Though, knowing Barty, he would probably enjoy it.

A quick glance to his horcrux’s frame revealed that it was still empty and that his counterpart was sulking in the back of it somewhere.

Ass.

Tom sat at his desk as the two made their way in. It had been a long day, and they were making it longer.

The small headache, forming behind his eyes was not helping either.

"Barty, stand at the door. Bellatrix, come and have a seat."

Bellatrix shot Crouch a grin and made her way to the chair in front of him, "Your majesty, I know how Skeeter has been doing it." A piece of paper was pulled from her bag and slid across his desk, on it was a sketch of a beetle, "She's an animagus. That is what she looks like."

Vials of memories were placed on his desk as well, "I broke into the Prophet Editorial offices and found their information bank, the one with all their evidence, and discovered these, it didn't make any sense when I entered the memories, but once I viewed my own memory of the event I found her in it. I'm sure that if you check your memory of after the Wizengamot session you will be able to locate the beetle in it."
Tom looked at the paper in his hands and let out a small laugh, "So many unregistered animagi out there. We will really have to put a stop to this now that I am King. Were there any complications?"

Bellatrix grimaced, her jaw twitching, "...The man I imperiused to break open the vault for me killed the chief editor."

Tom stared at her blankly for a minute as he processed what he thought had been a well done job turned into a potential disaster.

"The chief editor of the Daily Prophet was murdered the night of my celebration party?"

"Yes. I told him to not allow anyone into the vault, but I didn't realize that he would kill the man."

"What happened after Bella? Did you hide the body? What?"

Crouch coughed and began to walk forward, "My Lord, may I chime in?"

Tom hit him with a silent and wandless silencing spell, "No. Bellatrix, what did you do."

She bit her bottom lip, "I took the body and placed it at the bottom of the stairs, made it look like he slipped going up them. No one will think anything of it, just a little accident."

Tom pinched the bridge of his nose, "I will commend you for your quick thinking Bellatrix, but this is unfortunate, people will begin to put conspiracy theories together." He sat back. "Merlin, what a day."

There was a crack as his house elf popped into the room, "Master, Lord Malfoy is here and he says it's very urg--"

The elf was cut off by the door banging open and Lucius, striding through, his face flustered and his hair had small flakes of... ash? in it.

"Your majesty, the Daily Prophet has gone up in flames."

Tom didn't react except to turn and look at Bellatrix, "Bella, what the fuck?"

Her hooded eyes opened wide and she shook her head violently, "I didn't do it! I swear on my bloodline! I left the body there, right out in the open, it was a beautiful little tableau and trust me I did think about setting it all on fire, cause fire is really great at covering up things but I thought it would be best not to set him on fire cause that would look bad. I swear I didn't do it. I left the lantern on the desk, there was no other way. My Lord I swear to you." Her voice had turned pleading.

Tom sat back and steepled his fingers as he looked at her. He tapped briefly into her mind and knew she was telling the truth on the matter. His lips pursed in a thin line, "There might be rumours, but it's not like anyone will be able to report on them... Lucius, see if there's any shares in the Prophet you can buy out. I'm sure Muriel Prewett will want to unload hers because of this. Get any you can. I want to have a controlling interest in the Prophet."

"Is there a limit to how much money should be spent on this?"

"Use up to half of the Fund, if you need to."

"H-half? That's nearly 4 million galleons." Tom had never heard Lucius stutter before and it was well worth the wait.

"We're running the country now Lucius. We can replenish the fund with some creative accounting
later."

Lucius nodded, "Of course, My Lord. I will see to it." Lucius spun on his heel and left the room with a brisk walk.

Tom pinched the bridge of his nose and leant forward, "Bella, I will admit that this had created an opportunity for us right now, but if I find out you did burn down the Prophet, God help me I will have your hands cut off."

There was no sound in the room for nearly a minute before Bellatrix whispered, "I understand."

"Good. You did good work, up until the point everything caught on fire. Now, get out of my sight."

She left.

Tom turned to Crouch, "What are you doing here? It's four in the morning, I saw you less than six hours ago, and if you are simply here to bathe in my presence you are going to be sorely disappointed about my disposition right now." He removed the silencing charm from Crouch.

"I- I was just here to see how Bellatrix did, you said that if she failed I would take over the Skeeter investigation."

A half-truth. Tom let it slide for the moment, the pressure behind his eyes was building, "I want you to keep an eye out for Skeeter." He passed the paper over to Crouch, "Watch for her, and when you can, catch her. I think it's time her and I had a talk, man to bug."

"As you wish, My Lord."

"Now fuck off."

Harry tapped his quill against the parchment.

What to say.

There were so many things he could say. Truths and lies and everything between, but none of them suited what he needed.

Did he need to come clean to his father or did he need to push Tom's agenda? His father's ideals wouldn't allow for Tom's true agenda to come to fruition so he couldn't tell his father the truth about anything. So many little issues between them. All of them starting 7 years ago, the moment the Sorting Hat left his head.

Harry loved his father but it was a distant love. Everything he said was closely considered before Harry would speak to him, the last summer before he had met Lord Slytherin was probably the most relaxed Harry had been around his father in years. Joking around and laughing at Sirius's antics, and with the introduction of one man into Harry's life it had regressed back to the state it had been when Harry was fourteen.

It had been horrible that year. Harry would admit that hormones had been a cause of a lot of his surly moods, but he had also started to become critical of his father's political leanings and how he conducted his job at the Ministry.

Harry would admit that during around that time he had been listening to Draco and the others a bit
too closely, trying to blend in with them and act more like them. He didn't hold their political beliefs in his heart but he acted like he did. He had become a chameleon in order to fit in with them and that was how he had damaged his relationship with James.

Harry felt that it wasn't fully on him though, James had been inflexible with his opinions on politics and had implied that Harry didn't understand the intricacies of the Wizengamot and Sacred 27, which he hadn't, but the insult to Harry's intelligence had been more than enough for them to spend three weeks of his summer vacation not talking.

And so Harry was mad that James called him stupid and wouldn't acknowledge a few faults in his belief system and James was mad that his son had seemingly become a blood purist that didn't approve of the Wizengamot.

No one was right in that situation.

Well, his mother had been. She had called them stupid and left to go stay at Hogwarts until they sorted it out.

Neither of them saw her the rest of that summer.

Dear Dad, James, Daddio.

Dear James

Harry tore off the top of the sheet.

Dad,

I'm sorry for not responding to your last letter. I didn't know what to say. As you know it's just been so hectic lately and I feel like the world is spinning faster and faster and I can barely hold on with all these changes.

I think it would be best if we didn't talk politics given who I am dating. I want you to know that I do understand your point of view on the matter, but I know Tom better than you, and I wish you could trust my judgement.

He's a good person. He may have his own issues or he may be flawed and underneath his really, really handsome exterior is someone who is so deep that I could almost drown in him.

I'm not going to say I love him, but I do care. I feel drawn to him.

I figured that in order for us to reopen borders between us, I will tell you what I'm up to.

As you expected I have been studying for my N.E.W.T.'s, sneaking out of the school for snogs (amongst other things), and I may have party crashed the celebrations at Kensington Palace last night.

The fun fact is that it wasn't just me but Hermione did the same. I know. Straight laced Hermione broke out of the school to party it up with the purebloods. What is the world coming to?

I think it turned out well though, she got a job lined up because of it.

I will add that Tom did not expect me to come nor did he expect me to break out of Hogwarts. He was completely surprised, so you don't have to think that he's out there corrupting the youth.
Hermione and I were only able to get through the front door because a man behind us recognized my name and said we were his guests.

I had no clue who he was either!

It was driving me nuts so I went and looked him up in the peerage book, but yeah I guess i should send Augustus Avery a fruit basket or something.

If you can think of anything that is appropriate to send to a member of the Sacred 27 let me know.

Not Regulus or Sirius though, someone normal who wouldn't expect a huge inflatable dick in a box from some random teenager.

Your son,

Harry.

He sealed the letter, made his way out to the owlery, sent it and headed in for breakfast. He now sat at the Slytherin table eating his breakfast and drinking a cup of tea and a cup of coffee in hopes that he would be able to head off his inevitable midday slump.

Yes, he snuck out of the school and stayed up late, rubbing elbows with the snobs of society, got his picture taken and may have had sex with the new King of magical Britain during said party, but it wasn't fair that he couldn't just skive off his classes for a day.

Transfiguration was the first one and McGonagall would probably be looking to nail him to the wall if she spotted his picture in the paper. Not that he knew his picture was in the paper but he suspected it might be.

Harry glanced around, he didn't see it anywhere. He didn't see anyone with it either.

"Has the Prophet come in yet?" He asked to the table at large.

He received some half-hearted shrugs and a few shakes of the head.

There had been a few late editions over the years, but he figured that Tom's party would warrant an early rush to it...

He finished off his breakfast and walked to Transfiguration.

There was still another fifteen minutes before it would start, so he slid off his bag and began to root through it to look over his homework.

"So, how was the little "shindig" that he threw?" asked a voice from behind him.

Harry stood up and spun around to where there was a painting of impressionist water nymphs.

In the middle was the the painted Tom.

"Did you really just call it a shindig?"

"Did you really just call it a shindig?" The painting said in a mocking tone, "What if I did? How was it? I couldn't tell since I was locked in your bedside table drawer!"
"Maybe you wouldn't be locked in that drawer if you weren't so unpleasant all the time."

"Maybe I'm unpleasant because I am constantly locked in places I don't want to be locked in!"

"Maybe you should stop being a dick which makes people want to lock you up!"

"Maybe that's just who I am and you will have to deal with it!"

"Maybe I don't want to!"

"....Harry? Are you yelling at the painting?"

Harry turned to see a red-eyed and fairly exhausted looking Draco, "It was being a dick." He looked back at it but the painted Tom was gone.

Ass.

"You okay Draco? Stayed up a little too late partying?"

Draco snorted, "I wish. As we were leaving the party my father was informed the Daily Prophet was on fire, so he dragged me out to some mansion, left me in the lobby, and then we went around to all these other places with my father waking people up and trying to buy shares of the Prophet."

"Why didn't you just apparate home?"

"Merlin, I wish. He said that it was a "learning experience". and that I need to know about this stuff-" Draco released a loud yawn, "and that business is an all hours sort of thing."

"I'm sorry," Harry gently patted Draco's back as his brain processed what Draco had said, "...Wait. Did you say the Daily Prophet caught fire?"

Draco nodded and yawned again, "Yeah. Top four floors caught fire, and the warehouse next to it burned too. Apparently the presses melted."

"Holy shit."

"Yeah, it's good luck for you though."

"What? How?"

"You can't get in trouble for sneaking out of the school if the photographers have nowhere to share the images."

"Small blessings I guess." Harry said weakly.

The day was already off to a wild start.

Coming from the opposite end of the corridor was Hermione, books in her arms and even more bulging out of her backpack, "Is Professor McGonagall in there? I need to ask her something." She didn't look as tired as he felt or as Draco looked, instead she seemed well-rested and chipper.
Morning people.

"She's not. I think she might still be down in the Great Hall."

"Shit."

"Didn't know you could swear Granger." Draco smirked.

"How about you shut your fucking no lipped mouth. I was talking to Harry, not you." She snapped at Draco, "Bye Harry. See you later."

They both stood, mouths agape as she walked away.

"Wow." Harry said and shook his head, a smile dancing on his lips, "You okay Draco?"

"...is it bad that I want her to be my mistress? I can have Pansy or someone as a wife but then I go to a townhouse in a different city and she's there ready to yell at me?"

"I think you like dominant women."

"I'll be right back." Draco said and scurried off to the bathroom, the door swinging shut with a loud thud.

"Oh god! I did not need to know that."

"Did that little thin-lipped ferret say the Daily Prophet burned down?"

Harry turned back to the painting who was leaning against the frame with his arms crossed.

"Yes."

"I'm going to go speak to my counterpart. I want to talk to you tonight."

"Don't you always?"

He was gone.

Merlin, Harry felt like he was King's Cross, everyone briefly visiting him before going elsewhere.

"Okay, fine. Whatever. Have fun talking to yourself."

"Like you are Mister Potter?"

"OH COME ON!"

Chapter End Notes

Short Chapter this time. I'm going through what I have written and editing it a bit. Been having a fair bit of writers block with this fic and writing in general. Hopefully the next
chapter will be longer.

I would also like to sincerely apologize for not replying to comments. I usually like to reply to comments after I post a new chapter, which is okay if I'm uploading weekly, but since it's been a few months it's inexcusable on my part. I intend to reply back in the next day or two.

Thank you everyone for sticking around. ily
James stood huddled in the doorway near the smouldering wreckage of the Daily Prophet. The frame of the building was still intact, but the floors and walls of the upper stories were gone. Several architectural wizards stood above him on the bulkhead's, reinforcing them. It would not do for them to tumble over and crush the remains of the printing warehouse.

Alice stood next to him as they assessed the damage, "Amelia will bring in some specialists to look into it, but I was talking to one of the interns and they said that if anything were to cause the fire it would be the writing room, the bullpen, said it was absolutely covered in parchment. The receptionist backed him up and said they had actually been in trouble for not cleaning it up from the Department of Wizarding Workplace Hazards. Every year."

"Every year?"

"Yeah, every year they were getting inspected and cited for violating some safety standard. They said they would clean it up but they wouldn't, and DWWH doesn't come back for reinspection if you pay the fine."

"How much is the fine?"

"Fifty galleons."

James snorted, "That's nothing."

"Yes, indeed. The fines haven't been adjusted for inflation since the Division was started. Members of the Sacred 28 in the Wizengamot have prevented the passing of legislation for the last fifty years and no one really seems to care."

"I wonder how much money they have saved from only paying low fines off."

"Probably enough to fund our division for a year."

James chuckled, "Given how many wands Tilly seems to go through a year that seems impossible."

"Ollivander has refused to stop selling them to her."

"I thought that had been the case for the last three years."
"I think she sweet talked him into selling her a wand a while back."

He shook his head, "She really needs to have some sort of metal case around it or something." He tried not to think about one of the younger witches that had joined the DMLE a few years back, it wasn't that she was clumsy but that she was careless. The worst wand break he had seen was when she had dropped her wand, tried to save it from falling to the ground with her foot and kicked it into the fireplace.

They stood in silence, watching as a section of brick wall collapsed into the street in a shower of red sparks.

James took off his glasses and rubbed them with his shirt, "So, the Prophet just happens to burn down after Slytherin is declared King. Fancy that."

"Don't look at me, I didn't vote for him."

"Even if you did, it wouldn't have done anything to stop him. Fucking Ollivander voted for him, what the hell happened there?"

Alice shrugged, "He's always been a bit loony."

They stood there, either thinking of the difficulties to come with the installation of what was definitely not a dictator-to-be, or just watching panicked reinforcement of the building while playing the Benny Hill theme song in their heads as they did so. Who knows.

"How's Frank?"

Alice stomped her feet in an attempt to warm them. "He wants to get back out on the field, mainly because Augusta is driving him up the wall. She likes to think she's a nurturing person and now she sits in his room and gets on his case when he has problems using his left hand to eat. Deranged bint. St. Mungo's has been treating him well enough. They talk to him and help him get used to it. We're going to put a bit of money into getting him a prosthetic of some sort, we heard about some wizard down in Tripoli that can conjure them, so we've sent a few owls down."

James nodded, "That's good to hear. It'll be good to have him back." He had missed Frank. He was probably one of his favourite people to work with at the DMLE.

"Nev's been shook up. He's a sweet boy. Didn't like hearing that his dad got hurt so badly. It's one thing for your dad's boss to get killed, but for your dad to get maimed? Too close to home. He's asked a few times if Frank is going to retire."

"I don't blame him." James reached into his pocket and squeezed the parchment he got from Harry earlier.

He hadn't expected it, and part of him was relieved to have communication from his son, but a larger and more upset part of him wondered if he had been told to contact him by Slytherin.

It's right there in the letter for Merlin's sake! He had seen Slytherin last night and now he had a letter in hand.

"James? You okay?" Alice had put her hand on his arm.

He shook his head, "Not really. What would you do if your son started dating someone you consider to be an up and coming dictator and you were forced to start questioning his loyalties?"
Alice raised an eyebrow, "I can't imagine. You sure he's not imperiused?"
"Fairly."
"Love Potion?"
"I checked. He's not being influenced at all."
"Except by his thirst for dick...tators."
James sighed.
"I'm sorry."
James shrugged, "...Do we know the cause of the fire?"
Alice's voice shifted to her professional mode, "The pressman that first spotted it said that it was on the top two floors. So, we're assuming it started up there but we won't be able to check until the warehouse stops burning and they reinforce the support structure of the upper floors."
"Did they say why they can't get the fire out in the warehouse?"
"Something to do with the ink they use for printing the pictures. Apparently, it's unstable or something. I think they said goblins were involved, I don't know."
"Huh. The more you know."
They stood in the falling snow and watched as cursebreakers tried to put out the fire.

The press was fully destroyed a few hours ago, the frame was warped and scorched, the leads had melted and pooled in the basement of the warehouse.

Reporters had been showing up for a few hours to find out they were unemployed. The ones that had shown up quickly were the shareholders. They had appeared and yelled and screamed and stomped their feet before being told to leave.

Alice shot him a semi-nervous look, "So, I heard you were put on probation and taken off the Crouch investigation." She leant back against the wall and lit a surreptitious cigarette, hidden away from the wind.

James groaned, "I'm not... on probation so to speak, and the Crouch investigation was closed. The guy killed himself and that's the end of that."

"And your "not probation"?" She asked, passing him the cigarette.

James pulled a small drag from it, coughing into his sleeve before returning it. He needed to keep this lie as simple and clean as possible, Amelia had said that no one could know that he was now an Unspeakable, "Some people are nervous about Harry's connection to Lord Slytherin and therefore mine."

She snorted, "Merlin, Harry really is out there trying to kill your career."
"I don't care if he kills my career, as long as he doesn't get hurt and or brainwashed by them." That was one of the few things he wanted. Harry, safe and sane and not dead, but preferably, not evil.

Alice chuckled, "The joys of only having one heir. It's an all or nothing bet."
"You'd think the smart money would be on the effect of parents on their children."

Alice took a long drag on her cigarette, "Not to polish my own wand or anything, but I have to say Frank and I haven't had any problems with Neville. He hasn't fully bloomed into his own but I like to think he will come around."

James stopped himself from rolling his eyes at the brag, he definitely felt like he had been dealt a tough hand with Harry. Not to say that he didn't make his own flubs while raising him but he really didn't need Alice rubbing it in his face.

They stood in silence, sheltered in the doorway across from the Prophet and watched part of the building collapse.

James thought it was probably the most appropriate symbol of the start of Lord Slytherin's rule.

The death of the press.

Regulus made his way into the dining room of Pemberton's and spotted his brother, which was a surprise, to say the least. Sirius couldn't stand to come into a pureblood establishment such as this. He made his way over and sat down next to him. "Sirius." He wondered if Sirius was here to see him. Somewhere that was a public setting where it wouldn't come to blows for fear of the public outcry.

"Regulus." He replied stiffly, glaring at him.

"I didn't know you were talking to me."

"I'm not talking to you. I'm talking to my traitor brother who voted for Lord Slytherin." Sirius' nose was crinkled as if Regulus had stepped in something outside but it was all of Regulus, not just his shoe.

"I did do that didn't I?" He said with a chuckle.

Sirius glared before punching his arm, "Ass." It wasn't a lighthearted punch, but one that threatened incoming violence. Their mother had used to do that too.

"He was going to be made king no matter what. Why fight the inevitable?"

"Because what he represents is wrong!"

"And?" Sirius shot him a look of disgust, "I would much rather be on Lord Slytherin's good side in this new world order."

"...Do you even hear what you are saying?" Sirius was staring at him with his eyes wide, shock and disbelief etched on his face. Regulus grabbed Sirius' goblet and drank heavily from it. "I am well aware of what I am saying, but Sirius, look at it from my point of view, you can do more good from the inside than publicly opposing him. Just sit back and enjoy it."

Sirius rolled his eyes, "That's essentially saying that if someone is being raped that they should try to get off."

"Bit of a reach, but alright then," Regulus replied. He loved his brother but he could not see the bigger picture here. There was no fighting against Lord Slytherin.
"I should just take over the responsibilities of the head of house from you." He growled, leaning forward with his shoulders hunched, he almost looked feral for a moment.

Regulus rolled his eyes, refusing to be cowed by his older brother, "You wouldn't. You're too lazy to do everything required to be Lord Black and the fact that if you do I will take you before either Lord Slytherin, the Sacred 28, or the Wizengamot and have you publicly humiliated before having you declared incompetent."

Sirius blinked at his brother's cavalier attitude, "What, in Merlin's name, happened to you?"

Regulus shrugged, "I grew up. You didn't. Slytherin won because you and your friends prefer to think that people are inherently good instead of the greedy, self-obsessed beings they are. He played off their fear and their prejudices and won. It wasn't just the Sacred 28 he had to win, it was the wizarding public, if people didn't want him in there would be riots, protests. Anyone with a bit of foresight could see Slytherin and his movement coming from a mile away, but everyone just had their heads buried in the sand, content to look the other way and not realize what was happening around them before it was too late. Look at the streets, Sirius. There's no one rioting, and even if they did, he's not the cause of the problem. He's just the symptom of our society."

"And you're going to benefit off of all the strife he causes since you're in a position of power that the majority of people aren't able to. You won't feel bad about that at all will you?" Sirius snorted, his nose crinkling in disgust.

"I'm one of those people out there that only care to protect me and mine. Slytherin's interests are aligned to my own. I don't have a wife or children, most of my friends are aligned with Slytherin, Harry is more than aligned with him, the only outlier in my life that I face is you... but I have been used to being on the opposite side of you for decades at this point. No matter what happens you will be fine so I don't even actually have to worry about you."

"You don't?"

"Unless you go out to start some sort of rebellion, no, I don't. And even if you do I'm not your damn keeper."

Sirius stood up from the table with a loud clatter that echoed through the Pemberton's room around them, "Maybe I will!"

The other guests were silent, looking at Sirius and listening with great intensity.

Regulus shook his head in semi-amusement, "I can see the headlines now "Sirius Black starts secret anti-royalty organization; Sirius Black, James Potter, and Remus Lupin have been arrested immediately." The follow up would be about how you and James were set free and Lupin gets sent to jail."

Sirius' brows knitted "...Wait, why would that happen?"

"Are you really so dense? You're rich nobility and James' son is dating Him. The only person of no note is Lupin. If I was him I wouldn't be friends with you and James. The two of you have been nothing but trouble for him... and Peter, back when he was alive."

Sirius stared at him, his mouth partially agape. "I can't believe you're my brother."

Regulus shook his head, "You were always the Black sheep Sirius, not me."

Sirius turned on his heel, yanked his cloak out of the house elves hands and stormed out into the cold.
Harry closed his eyes and fell into his dreams.

Unfortunately, he was greeted by an asshole.

Not an actual asshole. At this point, an actual one would be welcome if it was some lust induced dream, but no, this asshole had red eyes and a puckered expression that mirrored everyone's favourite pink starburst.

"Tom." How did he feel so tired if he was asleep? Something about the painting just made him so exhausted, even when he was asleep.

"Did you burn down the Prophet in some drunken escapade?"

"No."

"What happened last night?" He continued with his interrogation.

"I suspect that Bellatrix burned it down. She was supposedly in there last ni--"

"The databank storage? For Skeeter?"

Harry bit back a sigh, Merlin, how could one version of Tom be such an ass compared to his actual Tom, "Yes, and there was no need to cut me off. I'm assuming they'll have that figured out and dealt with soon enough. But I think what will really make you get a full chub is the fact that Avery spoke to me last night."

The painting paused, his eyes wide, "He did?"

"Yes. He wants to offer me an apprenticeship. Take me under his wing and then probably cut open my head and figure out what your counterpart is up to." Harry held up a copy of the key that Avery had pressed into his hand the night before. Imprinted into the side of it was an address which Harry assumed was Avery's.

The painting licked his lips as he took it in. "This could be very dangerous."

"And somehow I doubt you would be upset if I ended up dead," Harry said, sitting down and giving the painting a look.

He had the decency to look a little admonished, "I would certainly be... annoyed if I lost access to you. You are a decent tool after all."

"Other Tom would be more than annoyed."

The painting rolled his eyes, "He has become overly attached to you for some reason that I cannot perceive. You're fairly intelligent, I will grant you that, but I have never seen any magical prowess from you."

"Maybe he likes this bomb ass dick between my legs."

The painting grew completely still before flickering out of existence for a moment. Most people think that a moment as a few seconds at most, but no, a moment is over a minute. Close to a minute and a half, which seems to be a very long time when trapped in a dream with no way out.
This moment was long enough for Harry to walk around the room several times, avoid the painting on the wall, and jiggle the door locks.

The room never really changed from when the painting pulled him in the very first time. There was the chairs that the painting could create with a mere flick of the wrist, but other than that it remained the same. It didn't look like anything at all really. There were a few rooms in Hogwarts without windows, but this looked like a stripped down room from the Georgian era.

Harry looked for the light, but there was none. It just seemed to be lit by an invisible source.

In those long 90 second's as he waited for the painting to return, he realized that he would go absolutely looney if he was trapped in this place. Off the wall nuts, complete and utter basket case within a week. There was nothing to do.

The painting popped back into existence. His cheeks were red like he had been cursing up a storm.

"Are your paintings and this room the only places you can go?"

He looked taken aback like he had been expecting a question but not this question. Not that he really could expect the question, the painting wasn't able to divine the future as far as Harry could tell.

Merlin, if he could tell the future, Harry suspected the painting would be much calmer and less prone to smacking people around.

Though, if he went to smack Harry again, Harry's shin would be meeting someone's oil painted nut sack with a fury of a thousand hippo's with extreme territorial aggression.

"...yes."

"Sounds unpleasant. Why would he do that to you? You're conscious. I know you're smarter than other painting's I've interacted with." Harry tried not to lay it on thick, maybe a little thicker than his usual disinterest, but not too thick that it looked like he was icing a cake.

"Am I?" The painting's voice was a tad higher than usual.

"You are significantly smarter than other paintings. Most of them can obey commands from their owners or the property they are loyal to and can work on following them out. And then there are the others that seem to have a single-minded purpose which is mainly being a pain in the ass. Sirius got a painting from his mother after she died that just screamed at him until he hired someone to destroy it with fiendfyre. That's all it did, day in and day out it just screamed about him being a blood traitor." Harry hoped that by piling a ton of information on that the painting wouldn't notice the unspoken question.

"Intriguing, perhaps you haven't seen that many truly intelligent paintings." His gaze was distant, unseeing.

"I've been in Hogwarts for the last seven years, I'm friends with the Black's and the Malfoy's, and I've been to numerous places with a large number of magical paintings including France, Italy, Spain, and Hungary. I have never met one like you before. You're special."

The painting said nothing.

"And Tom gets annoyed at you but it's not like he would ever harm you. Punish you, yes but harm you? I think not. You work for his best interests but you also work around him. I don't think any other painting would have the sense to do that. I understand Tom is a genius... and old... and you
look like how he used to look... How did he do that?"

"You should really stop talking about this. There are other things to discuss. We need to talk about Avery and then your occlumency."

Harry flushed at the mention of occlumency. That had not been going well, "I see you diverting the subject but I would like to touch back on it and I do want to mention that the plus side about Avery is that I don't have to worry about him being a legilmens."

"Just because he is blind doesn't mean he can't see. Avery relies on people letting down their guard." The painting had returned back to his more curt self, not that the conversation was away from him.

"What, like he can't see so his other senses are stronger?"

The look on the painting's face was the perfect definition of unimpressed, with a slight side of "I'm going to bash my head into the wall repeatedly because you are killing me here."

The painting's jaw was set, jutting out a small amount, "Are you implying that he can't just do that magically? Have you forgotten that magic exists? That he collects information from all the places he can before he sets out?"

Harry clenched his jaw and looked away, a blush staining his cheeks at his oversight, "Can we move on?"

The painting cocked his head to the side, his lips tucked to the sides in a small, smug grin, "Of course we can Harry. I would never wish to make you uncomfortable." He reached over and patted Harry's cheek.

To say it set off Harry's panic mode was, to say the least, ready to be struck, but before he even had a chance to back away, the painting was breaking into his mind with legilimency.

Harry struggled, he struggled to put up his walls and repel him.

He threw up a fake memory.

He threw up some random memory of a movie.

He threw up a memory of an empty beach, with a dancing crab.

He threw up.

Vomit splashed onto the painting's chest and the assault on his mind was over.

The painting stepped back, disgust etched onto his features, a wave of his hand and the vomit vanished from the room.

Harry spat out the remaining remnants of puke, "Please tell me I didn't puke in my bed."

The painting rolled his eyes and puke faded from existence, "We'll be able to tell if you drop dead, but I feel like I'm not that lucky... You were able to fend off my assault better than before."

Harry dry heaved a bit more, spitting onto the ground, "I don't understand your approach. You're trying to bash open my head, but I feel like we should focus on people who are trying to read my surface thoughts. Is there really going to be a chance that someone will attempt to brute force entry into my head?"
"There's always a chance for that. Never underestimate your enemies."

"At this point, my enemy is the Ministry."

"And eventually it will be the purebloods as society is thrown into chaos and they will not obey the law's of the Ministry if they are trying to stop my counterpart."

Harry pursed his lips, "That's pretty far down the line. I think we should focus on the other aspects of it. To stop people like Snape from getting into my head, or even Tom, if you don't want him to know what you're up to right now." He stood up straight, wiping his lips with the back of his arm.

The painting sighed and looked away. "Perhaps you are right. Relish that, for it is the only time you will hear me say it. We will work strengthening your mental barriers against casual intrusions."

Harry sighed in relief, "Good. Before we start that though, what do I do about Avery? Should I go meet him?"

"...No. Not yet. We need to make a plan. We need to know what you can do there. He said an apprenticeship?"

Harry nodded.

"This could work out. He's sourced you out in order to get to Tom. To be able to control you will be another aspect of him controlling Tom."

Harry frowned, okay maybe this wasn't the best idea. "Maybe I can just drop your chocolate frog card behind a table and you can figure out what he's up to."

"No. I have no interest in doing lurking in his office listening for the off chance of information." He shook his head and walked back and forth, "I am going to need to think about this. We will need to plan this carefully."

Harry nodded, "I understand."

"I will work on this while you are awake. In the meantime, we shall work on your occlumency."

Harry bit back a groan.

Chapter End Notes

Ngl, I've thought about giving up on this fic for the last few months. I haven't had that much drive with it lately, but the other day I got the urge to continue it. I'm rotating on writing this and writing original stuff which I think is definitely helping with getting me working on this.

I won't be able to promise any quick updates but I am certainly going to try.

I'm no longer on Tumblr but if anyone wants to contact me I have a twitter. You can find me @daconlebbuceto1

Any and all comments are adored and appreciated. I really appreciate all of you.
Chapter 25

Chapter Notes

ngl, this one came out so quick cause i've been HYPED
I OWE NANIMOK MY LIFE AND FIRSTBORN FOR EDITING AND BEING MY EAR TO SHOUT IN.
i love her. guys go check out her really cute jaytim stuff. it's so good.
nani i will lowkey kidnap you and feed you boba and spicy popcorn chicken forever.
thank you babe.
you my girl. you my sister from another mister.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

WWA Chapter 25
February 22nd, 1998

It was one of those February days; one of the ones where the sun was out and shining but it was absolutely freezing. A brutal, dry cold that punched you in the chest, and you could feel the ice forming in your lungs as you breathed in.

But even though the wind was strong and the air was frigid, it was beautiful. The sun was shining on the freshly fallen snow, casting everything in a cool, but pleasant light.

Harry was making his way over to the Shrieking Shack to meet up with Tom before they headed to the Three Broomsticks to meet with Hermione. He hadn’t had a chance to really communicate with Tom since their last meeting at Kensington Palace so this way they could go over anything of note.

Hmmph. Harry had actually spent more time with the painted Tom in the last two weeks practicing his Occlumency. As much a he hated to admit it, Painting Tom, while not a good teacher, knew his stuff and was capable of, eventually, getting the lesson learned. Harry improved in leaps and bounds and he could now prevent a Legilimens from reading his surface thoughts.

Painting Tom had said that with a few more weeks of work that he would be able to fend off a minor attack on his subconscious, which, for that Tom, was high praise.

The wind whistled through the trees and a heavy gust pushed Harry forward. A path had already been cut through the snow leading up to the Shack. Given that it was before noon, it was only going to be Tom up there. No nerds looking at the historically haunted building this early in the morning.

He doubted that even Hermione would get up before noon for that.

An ominously cloaked figure was leaning up against the fence, watching the path that Harry was now treading. Given those long legs sticking out of the cloak Harry knew it was Tom, so for him, it wasn’t really that ominous. Although, if he hadn’t known it was Tom, he would have been pretty sure someone was about to get murdered and soon.

Harry trudged up through the snow, kicking it in the air, leaving it to flutter around them. He leaned against the fence with Tom, dropped his voice an octave lower and said the best pick up line ever,
"What's a sexy King like you doing at a haunted hovel like this?"

Tom snorted and dropped his hood. "If we had more time I'd drag you inside it and make you scream, be it the ghosts inside or my prick."

Harry's cheeks flushed violently and he felt like the canary that the cat ate. "Well," he said. "I was feeling a bit cold before but now I'm even colder."

"Oh?"

"All my blood went rushing to my groin."

Tom laughed and pressed up against him, their bodies flush with another. "It's been a mere fortnight since we last saw each other Harry, are you really that lonely without me?"

The back of Tom's gloved hand pressed against his crotch, rubbing the growing length beneath Harry's robes.

Harry shuddered and buried his face into Tom's shoulder. "I am. So lonely without you."

"Were we not outside and it was not freezing at the moment," Tom pressed a kiss against Harry's ear, "I would happily relieve you of your tenseness right now."

Harry snorted, the huff of air coming out as steam, "You'd fuck me in the snow?"

Tom chuckled, "I was thinking that I would suck your cock, only thing that would really have to get cold is my knees."

Already Tom had deftly taken off his glove and reached his hand through the opening of Harry's robes and into his trousers, gripping and stroking his length. Harry's knees felt weak. They were out in public and Tom should not risk being caught in flagrante like this but...

He bit his bottom lip and pressed up harder against Tom, rocking his hips with Tom's strokes. "You'd do that?"

"If it was a few degrees warmer, yes, but for now, I hope you can enjoy an illicit hand job."

Tom's thumb was teasing the tip of Harry's cock, using the precum as a lubricant before pumping his cock. "I can't wait for you to graduate Harry. I want you to be at Kensington Palace with me. I want to fuck whenever I want and not be beholden to the inane rules of Hogwarts."

Harry moaned and turned his head to kiss Tom deeply, licking his lips, "I want you to fuck me. I need you to. I've never felt whole until I felt your prick inside of me." He could feel Tom's erection pressed against him as he spoke.

Tom squeezed Harry's prick hard in an almost death vice for a moment and Harry spasmed slightly. "Only you. Only you can make me feel this way." Tom grunted and pressed his lips hard against Harry's in a deep and hungry kiss.

Harry shuddered. He was so close, and while logic said he should be worried about painting a nice splatter of white on the inside of his pants, he just couldn't. "Tom, I'm going to cum..." he whispered, pressing his face into Tom's shoulder.

Tom's voice was low, almost imperceptible. "Do it. You deserve it. Cum for me."

Harry moaned as he came, Tom's hand pumping furiously as he milked every last drop from Harry.
They stood there, pressed together as Harry caught his breath, Tom taking in Harry’s scent.

“Let— Let me do something for you.” Harry turned his face and kissed him, “If you cast a disillusionment charm I can.. I’ll suck you off. Let me do that for you,” he said breathlessly.

Tom chuckled and withdrew his hand from Harry’s pants before licking it clean of Harry’s seed. “You’re so wanton.”

“Only for you...”

Harry was kissing his neck. Something about Tom just intoxicated him completely. He heard Tom mutter the disillusionment spell under his breath and he dropped down, Harry’s knees buried in six inches of snow.

It felt warmer and he was forced to assume that Tom had also cast a warming charm around them, no need for him to get his prick frozen off.

He pressed Tom’s robes open and extracted him from his pants before engulfing him completely, burying his face into Tom’s abdomen as he swallowed him.

Tom’s hand snaked way into his hair, gripping his curls tightly as he held Harry’s head in place and began to thrust deeply into his mouth and throat.

Harry gripped Tom’s thighs, slowing his pace minutely but still letting him take the lead.

Merlin, Tom was so hard and Harry loved it. He loved that he could make this tightly coiled man lose control. Even when he was being throat fucked and couldn’t breathe he loved it.

Tom pulled out and a bit of spittle dripped onto Harry’s lip from Tom’s cock. “Sorry,” Tom muttered.

Harry chuckled and took a few breaths before licking the underside of his prick from base to tip slowly. “I love how you taste.”

He looked up at Tom, enjoying the look of a man nearly out of control.

Harry’s hand slipped to the base of Tom’s prick, holding it tightly as he took him in and deepthroated him again, bobbing his head along his shaft before pulling him out and sucking on the tip.

“Cum in me, I want to taste you,” Harry muttered before delving back down.

That was seemingly enough to push Tom over the edge, he grabbed Harry’s head again and came in his mouth. Harry drank it down greedily and licked Tom’s prick clean of any residue.

Tom stepped back and tucked himself back into his trousers and tidied his appearance. “Better get up before you get frostbite on your knees.”

Harry chuckled and was in the middle of sweeping his one leg around when he paused, “Oh, Merlin...” he whispered.

Tom raised a brow, “Are you okay?”

Harry let out in a strangled tone and looked to Tom for help. “I think I glued my dick to my zipper via cum and the cold.”

Tom’s eyes went wide and he was clearly trying to stop himself from smiling, but the edges of his
Harry’s lips were twitching upwards before he turned away and let out a hysterical laugh. He curled forward and grasped his knees as he let out a series of barking laughs that sounded like a dying zebra.

Harry sighed. He wasn’t going to be getting help from him. He worked to fish his wand out of his pocket. He would have to remoisten his crotch with hot water and then a scouring charm.

A quick augmenti followed by a hot air charm and he was able to stand. A scouring charm and a drying on followed and he was no longer Harry dick-frozen-to-zipper Potter.

He brushed the snow off his knees and the bottom of his trousers and turned to Tom, who had since stopped making noises and was furiously gasping for breath, tears in his eyes.

“You done yet?” Harry asked.

Tom took one look at him and doubled over again, his normally pale face flushed red.

Harry stood there, hands on his hips as he waited.

Tom wiped at his eyes and stood up straight before a hiccup escaped from him.

“Oh no,” he muttered and hiccuped again.

It was Harry’s turn to laugh as Tom grew more flustered with each hiccup.


“Oh shut up,” Tom said between hiccups.

Harry made his way over to him and slapped Tom’s back. “Let’s hope you get rid of these before we see Hermione.”

“Give me a second. I can make it stop if I hold my breath,” Tom said before immediately tightening his face up.

Harry shook his head and waited, hearing the little sounds as Tom tried suppressing the hiccups.

Time to just get this little briefing over before they went off to recruit Hermione.

“So, let's see, since we got distracted, I’ll just tell you a bit about what’s been going on,” Harry said. “My father and I have exchanged a few letters. Just little pleasantries and no political talks and talking about dinner at my mom's apartments. Draco is a prat and Hermione has been buzzing with excitement about today but has sort of been avoiding me for the last week. What you been up to?”

Tom’s face was nearly as red as his eyes, he looked like a rabid squirrel with those puffed up red cheeks.

“How you doing there buddy? Still got those hiccups? You going to faint there, pal? You want me to give you mouth-to-mouth when you collapse in the snow?”

Tom squinted at him before waving his hand and taking a deep breath, “I’m fine. I’m fine. They stopped. I think... I’m glad you and your father are talking.” He leaned backwards and cracked his back. “Yes, let’s talk.”

“How’s the Prophet investigation going?” Harry asked and they began to head down towards Hogsmeade. “I’m assuming Bella torched it.”
Tom groaned. “You know, when it happened, I thought that it was ultimately a good thing that we would be able to spin to our fortune, and it’s been nothing but a pain in the ass. Witch Weekly has hired some of the Prophet’s best writers, increased their publishing dates to three times a week, opened up their topics and have essentially become the Prophet, and now I have to have a subscription to WW and have to read their completely unfounded accusations that I ordered the Prophet burned down.”

Harry blinked, that was a lot to unpack. “Oh. Wow. Witch Weekly... is taking a stance that’s not about Celestina Warbeck’s new marriage?”

“Or the fact that she wore sandals to an event,” Tom muttered.

“I have to say I didn’t expect this from Witch Weekly.”

“And it’s only been two weeks,” Tom grumbled, he definitely seemed like he needed to vent about this, “It’s like the editor had been waiting to make political statements for years. The Prophet was generally easy to apply pressure on because we owned shares, but Witch Weekly is still privately owned. Morgana’s tits! Why did Bella have to burn it down?!” Tom angrily kicked at the snow, sending a small wave up into the air.

Harry chuckled at how petulant Tom was being. In all honesty, it was a serious issue but his reaction was worth it.

“Nothing you can’t handle though,” he reassured.

Tom sighed. “True, I’d just rather not.”

They walked in silence. Harry smiled as he watched Tom walking, his perfectly coiffed hair with snowflakes in it and his bottom lip stuck out in a serious pout. He imagined this was how Tom looked as a moody teenager, stalking the halls of Hogwarts or on his way to Hogsmeade.

“When’s the coronation?” Harry asked, hoping to take Tom’s mind of the Prophet.

“I was aiming for March but the Weasley’s, of all people, dug up one of the history books which had some stupid traditions that need to be followed which has pushed it to end of May.” Tom sighed.

It seemed like while they had succeeded in getting Tom in as King-to-be, they were now having to deal with the devils in the details.

“Well, at least I’ll get to go to it! I’ll be out of school by then,” Harry said cheerfully, slipping his arm through Tom’s, linking them.

“That is the one plus side I did see to it,” Tom acknowledged.

“You waited this long. You can wait a few months more.”

Tom chuckled. “True. I think I see Miss Granger in the window.”

Hermione had secured a circular booth at the window of the Three Broomsticks and already cast an anti-eavesdropping charm around the table by the time they arrived.

Hermione sat on the outer edge near the door, Harry in the middle and Tom on his other side.

There had been a few looks as they had made their way to the front door of the tavern, people watching Tom and Harry as they walked through town. Thankfully no one had really looked when
they had entered, given that the Three Broomsticks was so crowded constantly.

“Miss Granger, it is nice to meet you again,” Tom said, nodding his head towards her.

“Your majesty,” She said stiffly. Her expression was blank and rigid and she kept looking to Harry.

“Let's just reinforce this a bit. Don’t want anyone listening in,” Tom said, strengthening the anti-eavesdropping charms around them.

“So, this is it,” Harry said cheerfully, “Two months after you asked Hermione, I got it to happen.” He looked to Hermione and then to Tom. This was the moment where they would recruit Hermione to their cause and she would realize that Tom wasn’t completely evil.

“You’re completely evil and a massive hypocrite,” Hermione blurted out, glaring Tom down.

Ah, fuck.

Tom’s eyes glazed over and he sat back. “Well, I guess you better lay out your cards Miss Granger. I assume there will be no rebuttal in my defence.”

“No, there will not!” She slammed a book on the table and Harry felt like his eyes were going to pop out of his head.

Tom’s diary.

The one he had left in the Chamber of Secrets.

Ah fuck.

Time had slowed completely.

_How?

“You told me how to find it,” she replied.

Merlin, had he said that out loud?

“Yes.”

Okay, time to stop.

“Harry, be quiet,” Tom said, his voice low. Dangerous.

Harry snapped his jaw shut.

Tom folded his hands in front of his face. “So,” Tom said. “Miss Granger, tell me about what you think is happening here.”

She sat up straight, a triumphant look on her face. “I found Corvinius Gaunt’s journal in the Room of Requirement. Harry gave that away, once I thought about the fact that it was in Hogwarts I knew it could be summoned via the Room of Requirement. I had also seen him with the Ashwinder’s and recreated that once I found the entrance in the girl's bathroom thanks to Gaunt’s journal.

“But, I didn’t need to even go into the Chamber of Secrets! The journal was more than enough. You’re a member of the Gaunt family. Banished from the Sacred 28. They would never allow one of those inbred _monsters_ on the throne even if they were descended from Slytherin.

_You’re a member of the Gaunt family. Banished from the Sacred 28. They would never allow one of those inbred _monsters_ on the throne even if they were descended from Slytherin._
“It gets worse though. Your father is a half-blood! Was your mother a muggle too? And now you’re being made the bloody King of magical Britain on the funds of purebloods, imagine how they would feel if they knew that their King was a half-blood or less! Merlin, you even live in your muggle family’s mansion!” She had turned to Harry, her face a rictus of rage, “And you knew all of this Harry and you’re still on his side!”

“She’s just, no. Stop,” Harry whispered. “He has his reasons—”

“No, you stop, Harry!” Hermione said. “Why won’t you just stop acting like a puppet to your blood supremacist boyfriend and stand up for what is right!”

Tom hadn’t moved, he wasn’t even looking at Hermione anymore but at the window, his gaze intense.

Hermione shook with anger. “You’re encouraging your own oppression, Harry! Your mother’s and mine! Everything he stands for is wrong!” She turned back to Tom. “So, Mister Riddle, you have two options, you either step down and fade into obscurity, or I publish the copies of my research in any publication that will take them! You have a day to make the announcement or I will end you!”

She slammed her hands on the table, stood up abruptly and stomped out the door.

Tom hadn’t moved an inch.

“Tom!” Harry nearly shouted, panic was blooming in his mind but the man’s gaze hadn’t shifted since before Hermione’s dramatic departure.

He watched in what seemed like slow motion as Tom took an empty mug from the table and quickly slammed it over a bug that was crawling along the window pane.

He heard the quick unbreakable and sealing spell that he cast over the cup before Tom turned to Harry.

“Tom, what was tha— What do we do?”

Tom pursed his lips into a thin line. “I looked into her mind, Harry. She won’t believe whatever you have to say, even if it is the truth… I need you to go to Hogwarts and find out if she’s told anyone or sent her findings out. If she has, let me know to whom and I will have it dealt with. You will need to cast a memory charm on her. It will have to be very strong.”

“Wha—but Tom, I’ve never done that before… It’s Hermione.”

“You can do it.” His gaze was still on the mug. “You must.”

Harry didn’t move. He wasn’t ready for this.

“Go. Now!” Tom commanded harshly and Harry bolted out the door after Hermione.

Tom looked down into the mug, turning it in his hands. “Well, Miss Skeeter, that was quite the earful?”

The beetle smacked up against the side.

Harry’s feet pounded against the snow, sending it flying. He could see her in the distance. Hermione
was half a kilometre from the gates of Hogwarts.

She had about a minute head start but he was already gaining on her.

Merlin, he should have brought the invisibility cloak with him, but it wasn’t like he thought
Hermione had found almost everything out! If only she had found out that Tom hated purebloods as
much as she did!

The path to the school was mercifully clear of other students as he chased her, what was going to
happen couldn’t be seen or heard.

Harry sped up until he was less than 50 meters from her.

“HERMIONE! WAIT!”

She whipped around and her wand was pointed at him, aimed dead for his chest. Her face was
flushed, and tracks of tears stained her cheeks. “I can’t believe you, Harry!” Hermione cried,
distressed. “He’s a complete hypocrite and a monster and so are you! How could you discover his
past and agree to serve him?!”

Harry raised his hands up, level with his head, hoping to calm her down. “Hermione, you didn’t let
him speak! You just went off half-cock—”

“I WENT OFF FULL COCK!” she shouted, green sparks shooting from the end of her wand.

“Look, he’s not evil. He hates the purebloods too!”

“You’re lying!” She shot a curse at him. “Stay away from me Harry!”

She turned on heel and ran for the castle again, passing through the gates.

Harry barely thought about it, hardly realized that he was doing it, but it flew from his wand and
struck her in the back.

“*Imperio.*”

Hermione went still.

“Gather all your evidence against Tom and meet me in the Room of Requirement,” Harry ordered,
voice shaking.

He had cast an unforgivable curse.

He had imperiused his friend. Ripped her free will from her and made her a puppet.

If anyone ever found out, he could go to Azkaban, next to no questions asked.

This was his first real crime. The rest he was probably an accomplice of some sort, but this he had a
hand in.

This was *his* hand, the spell from *his* wand.

It felt wrong. So wrong.

He stared at Hermione’s tracks through the snow. She was already in the castle. He followed behind
and made his way to the Room of Requirement.
The room Harry summoned was dark with large wooden chairs, one of which he threw himself onto. He dropped his head between his knees and took a series of deep breaths, hoping to stop himself from hyperventilating.

It had all gone wrong.

Everything was wrong.

She was supposed to listen to him and Tom.

She was supposed to realize that they were right.

She was supposed to join them!

She was supposed to trust him!

The door opened and Hermione made her way in with a large stack of brown, sealed envelopes that she dropped on the table in front of him, before sitting across from him.

Her bright eyes were dull and unseeing.

Unthinking.

Docile.

Harry’s hand shook as he pulled out the chocolate frog card.

The older Tom was looking at Harry with, if it was anyone else, could be compassion. It may have been pity.

“You heard everything?” his voice was on the verge of stuttering.

The painting nodded, “I’ve unfortunately been listening from the sloppy blowjob until now.”

The side of Harry’s mouth twitched, but tears threatened to spill from his eyes. “Can’t... can’t I just keep her imperiused? Make her loyal to Tom with the spell, but have her act like herself?”

He didn’t want to obliviate her. He didn’t want to rip part of her out and lock it away.

“No,” the painting said flatly. “The risk of her breaking free of the curse is too great. You are going to have to obliviate her. You need to find out who she has told.”

Harry didn’t look at her when he asked, “Hermione, who knows what you know about Tom?”

“No one.” Her voice was monotone.

He was surprised.

“Have you sent these to anyone?” Harry took one of the envelopes, opened it and began to flick through the papers.

Copies of the journal and diary. Pictures of the Chamber of Secrets. A report she had written detailing her findings.

“I hired two solicitors; one is Archibald Venturius, the other was Antonia Yang. They both received
sealed packets and if anything was to happen to me they were to deliver them to the press.”

Damn.

Harry clenched his fists, “Will they return them to you if you send a letter?”

“No. I told him to retain them indefinitely.”

Harry bit his lip and looked to the card, “What do I do?”

“I can handle it,” the painting said. “Destroy her research, and once you’re done, erase her memory.”

The painting was halfway out of the frame when Harry stopped him.

“Wait, how— how do I— how is the spell done?”

The painting rolled his eyes. “Just think of the subjects you want her to forget, say the word *obliviate* and the movement is roughly the shape of a lumpy lightbulb.”

Harry whispered, “Okay.”

The painting left the frame.

“*Incendio.*” He whispered and lit the pile of research lit aflame.

A resounding crash came from the other side of the table, Hermione had fallen to her knees and was now glaring at him through her bushy hair.

Complete and utter contempt in her eyes.

“Bastard!” she growled and bolted out the door.

Harry scrambled out of the room behind her, his feet struggling to find purchase. His instincts jumped into action as he aimed his wand and cast, “*Petrificus Totalus!*”

The spell hit her square in the back and her legs locked straight together, her arms slammed to her sides, and she tipped forward, falling.

Unfortunately, she was at the top of the stairs.

Harry watched in horror as she tumbled down the stairs. He could hear the constant thudding of each impact on the steps. He ran, only to find her crumpled at the bottom.

He looked around the area, no students, no teachers and no paintings.

Thank Merlin.

Harry shook as he cast the diagnostic spell on her. In the back of his mind, he noted that it was fortunate that no one was here, either in Hogsmeade for the day or at lunch. A few broken bones but that was all; she was unconscious but she was alive.

That was all that was important. He wouldn’t be able to live with himself if she died because of him.

He touched the back of her head where blood was beginning to pool.

“Oh god...” He waved his wand and focused on the subjects he needed gone, “*O-Obliviate.*” Harry whispered, wiping her memory of the knowledge of Tom’s real self.
Merlin, help him.

He took a deep breath.

“HELP!” he shouted, “HELP! THERE’S BEEN AN ACCIDENT!”

Chapter End Notes

omg please tell me what you guys think!
poor hermione :((( I LOVE HER SO MUCH
Chapter 26

Chapter Notes

As always I must thank Nani for looking over this and being that person that I yeet ideas at late at night and then she turns around and gives me even better ideas (aka chapter 27 is all her)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Harry paced back and forth in his mother's office. She and one of the prefects had been the first to arrive at the scene where Hermione had laid bleeding.

Harry watched in a sort of horrified silence as Lily had healed the cut and used enervate on Hermione. She had woken up, her eyes unfocused before slurring out some nonsense and passing out. His mother had levitated Hermione away and given him a firm order to go to her office and wait.

That had been almost an hour ago.

His hand shook as he repeatedly cast lumos and nox, flicking the office between light and darkness.

He could have gotten Hermione killed. She could have slipped further down the stairs, over the railing.

He was such a fool.

He should have tried to explain earlier, but no, Hermione had come to the same conclusion that he initially had about Tom; that Tom was evil, that Tom was corrupt, that Tom was a no good, two-faced liar.

Not that these weren’t true to an extent, but she didn’t know the true duplicity; didn’t know that Tom hated the oligarchy that surrounded them as much as Hermione probably did.

She must have thought that Tom had corrupted him completely, and she wasn’t wrong... She just didn’t have all the facts.

It must have all looked so bad, she had followed Harry’s footsteps in her research, come to the same conclusion, did damn near the same thing he had done, except that damn Gryffindor brashness got in her way, her damnable moral’s.

Hermione was one of his closest friends but Merlin she could be the most vindictive cunt in all of Europe if she had her moral compass pointed due Righteousness.

She would have been an amazing Slytherin if her moral’s were a bit more malleable, more open to compromise.

Harry sighed, he had fucked up so hard.

Today was supposed to be a day of him and Tom bringing her into the fold, conspiring against the elite that controlled Britain, but no, instead, she was upstairs probably confused as hell about what happened, and his mother was going to come down to grill him into a sandwich.
At least the fall could help explain her memory loss.

Thank goodness for small blessings...

He heard the door handle turn and quickly pocketed his wand as his mother came in, “Hermione is being transferred to St. Mungo’s. Poppy doesn’t want to risk anything with a head injury.”

Harry stood stock still, a chill shot straight through his body, “Is-- Is she okay?”

Lily shrugged, not even deigning to look at him; everything about her seemed down, even her hair which was usually a beautiful deep red seemed limp and frazzled, her bright green eyes were dull and downcast.

She sat down at her desk, pulled out two small snifters and a bottle of firewhiskey and proceeded to pour almost three fingers worth into each before sliding it to her son.

Harry sat down, wiping at his eyes, and took the drink, gazing into it’s swirling amber.

Lily said nothing.

Harry said nothing.

Lily continued to say nothing.

Harry continued to say nothing, in volumes.

Be silent and let the other person fill the void with talk, with comments and questions and... confessions. He knew this tactic well, he had been subject to it numerous times over the years. Mainly when something in the house broke and his dad wasn’t around to take the blame.

But Harry couldn’t say anything. He couldn’t trust her right now. She wasn’t his mum right now, she was Professor Potter, and he couldn’t tell if Professor Potter would slip veritaserum into a drink or not.

Lily took a long pull from her own glass, drinking nearly half the contents, and set it heavily on the desk, deciding that drowning the room in nothingness was getting her nowhere, “Harry, what happened?”

Harry looked up at her, his brow crinkled and shook his head, “I don’t know... It was so stupid.”

“Tell me why Hermione was meeting with you and Lord Slytherin at the Three Broomsticks.”

He shrugged, “Hermione wanted to meet him. She couldn’t figure out why I was okay with him, why I would take his side.”

Lily raised an eyebrow that spoke volumes about how she had the same questions. He ignored it.

“I managed to set it up. Tom was willing to meet her because she was my friend, but he and I showed up today and she just... she just...” He shook his head, “Mum, I don’t know.”

“You don’t know?” She leaned forward, her hands intertwined on her lap. He willfully ignored that she reminded him of Dumbledore at the moment.

“She just--” Harry waved his hands in the air, searching for words, “When she initially asked me to set up the meeting Tom hadn’t been made king and, well, I don’t know if you know this but Hermione and I went to the celebration party at Kensington Palace, and I know she got a job offer or
something there, but there were also a lot of pureblood creeps there, and I just... I think it all soured
er her to Tom even more. So, today we talked a bit and I thought it was going okay before she just...
exploded and called me a hypocrite and called Tom a monster and stormed out.”

Lily frowned, a critical look in her eye.

Harry could feel the small pressure of legilimency against his mind.

If he had time to think about the fact that his mother was snooping in his head, he would be
offended, but all his emotions fell away at the realization of what she was doing to him.

Using his training, he proceeded with setting up barriers in his mind, separating the truth from the
lies. If she pushed harder he would be forced to just wall off his mind which would alert her to his
use of occlumency, which he one hundred percent did not want her to know.

It was a dangerous game, but her use of legilimency wasn’t exactly legal, and him hiding things from
her with occlumency would only force her to look at him with more scrutiny.

“Why do you think that is?” Lily had shifted, her arms crossed on the desk, eyes on his.

Harry shrugged again, “Because I am? Because in a lot of lights Tom is? I claim to be for
muggleborn rights but here I am dating someone who surrounds himself with blood supremacists.
That alone can make him a monster in many people’s eyes and here I am, a halfblood with a
muggleborn mother... dating him.” He wiped at his eyes, they had started to water, but he could tell if
it was from his shame or from not blinking.

Lily cocked her head to the side, “So, you followed her back to the school?”

Merlin, she was better at this than his father, and James was trained to interrogate people. (Then
again Lily worked in a school, which meant she ran into more sociopaths than his father probably
did)

He nodded, his jaw clenched, “I was trying to catch up to her but she was running. I think Tom said
he was going to leave, I didn’t really pay attention, I was just so surprised... I think she went up to
the Gryffindor tower, I don’t know but I spotted her coming back down and... and... “Harry wiped at
his eyes and let out a shuddering sob, “I shouted to her, I just wanted to get her attention--” A
hiccup escaped him as he began to cry earnestly, “I didn’t think she would slip, like how many
times have we gone up and down those stairs? Thousands of fucking times, and she just... she just
slipped and I watched her fall... I didn’t know what to do, it was like I forgot how to use magic. I
could have used wingardium leviosa or arresto momentum, but I stood there like a gormless stupid
squib!”

He slammed his fist into knee and looked up at his mother, grief etched into his face, “I thought I had
killed my friend, and now you tell me she’s going to St. Mungo’s.” He buried his face in his hands
and stared down at the floor through the cracks between his fingers.

The grief wasn’t an act. He couldn’t fake this, not if his life depended on it. To a certain degree it
did, but he felt the pain, the guilt, the shame wrack his body.

Hermione was his friend and now she was hurt because of his mistakes.

Because he was a fool.

The room was silent for a long time until he heard his mother come around and pull him into a hug.
The horcrux generally known as Voldemort sat hidden near the back of his frame, watching as his counterpart sat at his desk rubbing his temples. Resting in the centre of the table was a mug that had clearly been stolen from the Three Broomsticks.

He was tempted to ask why his counterpart stole a mug, but given their pre-established kleptomania, he could not be arsed.

It was evening now, the sun had set over Kensington Palace. It had been hours since the solicitors had been dealt with.

After Harry had dealt with the girl's memory, Voldemort had switched frames to the office one, getting there before his counterpart did. He had lied and informed him that Potter had sent a message with a house elf, that delivered said message to him.

Thankfully his counterpart didn't think too hard about that information, or why the house elf would have told a random painting instead of the master of the palace.

Who can you trust if you can't trust yourself?

And Voldemort and Tom had always trusted each other.

Until Potter had come along...

Merlin, he disliked the brat but Potter held no harmful intentions towards himself or his counterpart. It would have been easier to hate Harry, but no, Harry loved Tom.

UGH.

Voldemort slid off the desk of the library he had been painted into and began pacing, casting glances towards Tom who just sat there looking into that dirty mug.

Crouch had been assigned to steal the documents and obliviate the solicitors. Tom had flicked through it idly before lighting it on fire.

Voldemort was tempted to return to Harry and make sure that the job had been done well.

And to, perhaps, make sure that the boy wasn't having a nervous breakdown, not that he would ever admit it.

Potter wasn't high on his list of people who could handle the stress of committing crimes. The boy would never be one of the people who would enjoy ripping the flesh off of an enemy, pressing salt into the musculature and then healing the skin back.

Crucio was a good spell, but it wasn't particularly creative. There was a simple joy in having an actual victim; someone that didn’t need to be kept alive, someone that wouldn’t be missed, someone he could spend his time with, slowly exploring every single inch of them and seeing what made them tick.

And to eventually see what made them stop ticking.

By Circe’s taint, he missed being able to do that. To go out and play.

But no. He was trapped in this painting. Separate from himself and the ability to enact any of his violent delights.
He kicked the picture frame.

"Do you think Harry was able to do it?" Tom asked, pulling Voldemort from his red-tinged thoughts.

Voldemort walked through the other paintings to one in front of Tom so they could look at one another, "He let you know about the solicitors. He would have told you already if he failed to obliviate her."

Tom nodded, still distracted by the mug, "Do you think he will be able to handle it?"

Voldemort shrugged, not that Tom could see him, "I think we should be thinking less about him and more about how much she was able to discover. That's two Hogwarts students."

"She only found out through Harry." Tom's tone wasn't really defensive, merely stating the obvious.

"You should bind him with an unbreakable vow. We cannot allow him and his mouth to give us away."

Tom shook his head, "No. I can't do that. Not to him."

Voldemort squinted, wanting to reach out and strangle his counterpart, "What is it with you and him? No, never mind. We are not going back into that argument again."

"Good."

"Voldemort sighed, running a hand through his hair, "Imagine if Skeeter knew about all of this? We would be doomed."

Tom chuckled darkly and held up his stolen cup, "She already knows."

It felt as if his cadmium red ran to titanium white at this declaration, "...What?"

"She was there. At the Three Broomsticks, waiting for us as a beetle."

The painting didn't move.

Tom didn't move.

There was barely a sound in the room before Voldemort shouted, "WHAT?!"

Tom sat the mug down on the desk and flicked it with a finger, "I am uncertain as to how she discovered the meeting, but I am forced to assume it was through her use of her animagus form,"

Tom tilted the mug, allowing Voldemort to see the beetle inside.

Skeeter bounced against the sides.

The painting grabbed the top of his head and began to pace in the frame. Can you hyperventilate if you have painted lungs?

"Are you mad? You are treating this as if it isn’t an issue. First Potter, then the mudblood and Skeeter!" He spun around, pointing at Tom with a shaking finger, "This is madness! It is complete and utter madness! Everything we have worked towards could have been undone today! How are we to rule Britain with the sword of Damocles known as Harry fucking Potter hanging over our head? At every step, he could ruin us! If they discover what we are, where we are from they would surely discover the conspiracy with Nott, Flint and Avery and realize that you are not some twenty-year-old brat but seventy! They will start asking questions then! They will find the remaining
Horcruxes! They will take the cup from whichever one has it.”

What he wouldn’t give to be outside of the painting and take control of himself...

He looked towards his painting across the room, to the door in the back, the one that he took to meet Harry in his dreams, the one that could grant him access to his other parts...

It would be foolish. He was already down to three horcruxes, if he went through that door there was a high chance of him reintegrating with his body.

Being held hostage in the painting was hell, but to become one again and risk an eternal death was something that he was sure his counterpart and other horcrux’s would agree it was not worth the price.

Voldemort turned back to see his counterpart watching him with a disinterested expression, “I have everything under control.”

“Nothing is under control except you! You are controlled by Potter! By Avery, Flint, and Nott! The only thing that has gone right in the last few months is the death of that old fool!”

Tom rolled his eyes, “Your paranoia is truly grating on my nerves.”

“My paranoia used to be your common sense. You’re too cavalier, too relaxed and uncaring. It shouldn’t have been the diary. We were too young and stupid, too confident in our plots.”

“Our plots would have gone fine if it wasn’t for a string of bad luck.”

“It wasn’t bad luck. We underestimated Avery and he has held it over us ever since.”

Tom didn’t reply, his jaw set angrily, “Dapper,” the house elf appeared, “Some wine please.”

The house elf nodded and popped away.

“I don’t like that elf. It used to be Avery’s. It probably spies on you for him.” Voldemort declared before the elf popped back into the room with a glass of wine for Tom.

Tom took the wine and drunk heavily from the glass, staring at the ugly face of it, “My counterpart thinks that you spy on me for your old master.”

Dapper didn’t say anything but met Tom’s gaze.

Tom swirled the wine, “Even if you did it’s not like I say anything I don’t want Augustus to know. Who knows I may have been letting you hear misleading lies for quite some time now, knowing they will get back to him, but I don’t care. Whatever information Avery might learn cannot stop me or my plans.”

The elf didn’t move.

“Oh, do fuck off somewhere else,” Tom commanded.

The elf popped away.

Tom stood, approaching Voldemort in his current frame, “I am in control of this situation. Yes, things have gone awry but it is nothing we can’t bounce back from. We are the King now, and we are immortal. I have you and I have Harry, and I think at this point that is all I need.”
Voldemort clenched his fists until the palms of his hands bled.

##

Harry woke up to the light of the early morning sun falling across his face. He blearily blinked away the sleep from his eyes, watching the sun slowly rise, staining the sky orange and pink with its brilliance. It was the same sun as yesterday but it seemed a bit kinder. Yesterday’s sun had been white and cold, but this one was brilliant with colour and brought light onto a new day.

He had fallen asleep on his mother’s couch, and at some point, as he slept she laid a blanket across him, taken his glasses and wand and set them on the table next to him.

Harry buried his face into the pillow and took a deep breath, enjoying the scent that he had always loved since he was a little boy. It didn’t have a particular smell, nothing like a spice or flower, but it was distinctly his mum. It smelled like home and safety, hugs and tender words.

Tears pricked at the corners of his eyes, he didn’t deserve to have her as his mother. He didn’t deserve to have someone love him as much as she did. She was kind and understanding and would fight the world for him.

In these last few months, he had hurt her more than he ever had before, and he could see it wearing on her.

Everything was strained now.

Harry sat up and put his glasses on, avoiding to look in a mirror. He didn’t want to see his face. His guilt.

Had he always been a horrible child? Had he been rotten? His father had certainly started to treat him that way when he ended up in Slytherin, had the hat just opened James’ eyes to what Harry actually was?

Or was he this way because he was sorted in Slytherin? Would he have been better in a different house? Some brash Gryffindor, friends with Hermione and out there ready to take out Tom? Or what if he had been sorted into Ravenclaw? Cold and aloof, struggling to keep up with the inner-house rivalry?

He couldn’t even comprehend the thought of him being in Hufflepuff. Some dunderhead that worked hard instead of smart.

Ugh.

He heard noise from his mother’s bedroom, the sounds of her feet hitting the floor. He got up and knocked on her door, opening it an inch when he heard a small mumble.

“Hey, mum?”

Lily wiped her eyes with the back of her hand, still waking up, “Yeah? What’s up sweetie?” Her hair was messy and tangled and an imprint from her corduroy pillow was on the side of her face.

He didn’t deserve a mum like her.

“I... um... I’m heading down to the Great Hall now, but I just wanted to tell you that I love you.”

Lily cocked her head to the side before walking over and pulling him into a tight hug. “I love you
too. I’ll always love you, Harry.” She held and rocked side to side, “I love you so much.”

Harry sniffed, fighting back tears, “You’re the best mum in the world.” He choked out.

He felt that he could stay in her hug forever, part of him wanted to, but he had to head out and face the rest of the school. Harry released his grip on her and a moment later she released hers on him.

“I’m- I’m going to head down to breakfast now.” He said, looking down.

Lily reached out, lifting his chin up, looking him in the eye, “I want you to know that no matter what happens, you can always come home.”

Harry slunk out of the office and into the Great Hall. Given that it was a Sunday and it was so early most of the Hall was empty, there were about fifteen student’s per house table with only a couple of staff up at the head.

Harry sat down near a couple of fourth years and began to eat. He tried not to pay attention to the stares he was getting. The two Slytherin’s he sat near merely watched him out of the corner of their eyes, but across the way, the Ravenclaw’s, Hufflepuff’s and Gryffindors were looking at him with a range of interest to disgust and anger.

Why was it so hard for people to believe that Hermione fell down a set of stairs in an isolated part of the castle after an argument?

Harry huffed, maybe if he believed the lie hard enough it would become the truth.

Voldemort had told him that occlumen’s could trick themselves into believing lies that they had told themselves. Part of him wanted to do that, to forget betraying his friend.

The other part of him that for some reason sounded like Draco told him to stop being a pussy. That part of him was a bit of a sociopath, to be honest.

There was a bit of hurried whispering from the Gryffindor table and then a scrape of a bench as three people stood up and marched over to the Slytherin table.

Harry didn’t look up from his food as they attempted to loom over him. Vince and Greg had made him quiet impervious to the Loom™ each time one of them woke him up during their first year.

He could see them shifting, their robes swaying a bit, as they waited for him to look up.

The fourth years next to him inched away.

“You going to just sit there eating your breakfast Potter?” Ah, Ronald Weasley.

Harry put down his fork and knife, sat back and looked at them, “That is generally what people do while eating breakfast.”

The three that had come to him were Neville Longbottom, Ronald and Ginny Weasley.

He used to have play dates with Neville. They had gotten along well enough but they were never really friends, just people whose parent’s knew each other. The Weasley’s weren’t really in his parent’s sphere of influence so he had never really known or met them before attending Hogwarts.

“What do you want?” Harry kept his voice as emotionless as possible. He couldn’t show anything.
“We want to know what the hell happened!” Ginny slammed her fist against the table, knocking over a cup and making the cutlery rattle.

Neville held a hand up to Ginny and sat down across from Harry and righted the cup, “Calm down you two... We were at the Three Broomsticks yesterday and saw what happened, didn’t think anything of it and then when we got back we heard Hermione was in the hospital wing.”

“We heard that you had pushed her down the stairs,” Ron growled.

Harry pursed his lips and looked at Neville who was likely to be the only rational one, “She yelled at us and came back to the school. I tried to catch up with her to talk, spotted her and shouted to her. She was at the top of the stairs and when she turned, she slipped,” Harry paused to look down, the stress and guilt of the last day weighing heavily on him, “I didn’t push her down the stairs. No matter what sort of argument her and I could ever have I would never intentionally harm her. She’s one of my closest friends.” He said in a whisper.

The three Gryffindor’s didn’t say anything for a moment, when Ron scoffed, “Sounds just like what a filthy Slytherin would say. You can save your crocodile tears for people who will believe them.”

Harry slammed his palms against the table and pushed himself up, “How dare you! I am Hermione’s friend! You’re the asshole who picked on her to the point that she preferred to do homework assignments with a filthy Slytherin than with her own housemates! I’ve been her friend for seven years! Since the start! I may be in Slytherin but I have never been unjustly cruel to anyone here, unlike you Weasley! You come over and accuse me of hurting my friend but what are you to her outside of a tormentor?! What are you to Hermione?” Harry’s voice had slowly been raising as he ranted until it was full on yelling at him.

Hermione had told him a few times, in moments of weakness, about how difficult it was for her to bond with her housemates. That they didn’t value her intellect or attitude, that she had spent the first Halloween at Hogwarts crying in the girl's toilet because Ron had made fun of her. The hypocrisy on display was outstanding.

The teachers at the table were watching them, McGonagall looked ready to get up and intervene but didn’t.

“Why would I hurt her anyway?! Can you even think of a reason in that tiny little pea you call a brain? If I was up to something “nefarious” as everyone seems to assume wouldn’t it be stupid for me to have a public disagreement with her and then hurt her? It would only bring suspicion down on me!” Harry kicked the bench out from behind him and walked around the table, getting nose to nose with Ron, “You clearly want a fight or you wouldn’t be over here defending someone you aren’t even friends with so let’s go! Let’s fight!” Harry’s blood felt like it was boiling over, at this moment that little sociopath part of him wondered if he would be able to cast the cruciatus.

Weasley’s gaze was furious, his hand tightening its grip on his wand.

Ginevra's arm went across Ron’s chest and pushed him back. Her wand was pointed at Harry, “Ron may not be Hermione’s friend but I am. She’s a friend of mine and therefore she’s a friend of my family, and since I am her actual friend, you should know that she’s been worried about you and your connection to Lord Slytherin for some time.” Ginny’s jaw was set and her eyes burned, “I don’t know what the three of you talked about but I think Hermione did have reasons to be afraid of you.”

The sound of heels clicking on the floor drew their attention to Professor McGonagall who stood looking at them, “Is something the matter?”
Neville looked from Harry to Ron to Ginny, “No Ma’am. We just wanted to find out what happened with Hermione.”

“I think everyone here heard Potter’s account of the incident since it was just shouted through the hall. Now, go back to your table,” She looked at Harry as if he was an oddity, “You can return to your seat Potter.”

Harry shook his head, “I already finished.” He turned on his heel and left the Great Hall feeling the weight of every eye on him.

He could only hope there would be another scandal that would get people to forget this one...

Oh, wait.

He had one.

As long as Tom agreed.

##

Draco strolled across to Harry’s desk, pulled out his chair, spun it around, and straddled it, “So, you pushed your pet mudblood down the stairs and are being a big pussy about it.”

Harry closed the book that sat on his lap, “I didn’t push her down the stairs. She fell. Now, kindly, fuck off.”

“Calm down buckaroo,” Draco raised his hands, “It’s not like she’s actually hurt. She gets to skip out on some homework assignments while in St. Mungo’s and the rest of us can enjoy her not throwing off the curve for once.”

Harry tightened his grip on his book, ready to hurl it at Draco when he thought of Hermione’s hair, matted with blood. No, he couldn’t hurt another one of his friends. Even if he was the biggest ass this side of Glasgow, “Don’t call her a mudblood. She’s not even here to defend herself.”

“Which is why it’s the perfect time to do so. No one to try and hex my ears off.” Draco got up from the chair and sat on the bed near Harry’s feet, “So, I think it’s obvious that I want to know what happened. Blaise and I saw you and his royal highness show up and Granger throw her shit and run out. Did you two mix some bodily fluid’s then pour it in her cereal?”

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Harry shrugged, “Probably. The only major adversity she’s faced in her life is,” he looked at Draco with a small smirk, “Well... You.”

Draco’s eyebrows attempted to do their vanishing routine into his hairline, “Really? I am what has troubled her most?”

“Duh. You’re a rich pureblood that harasses her for her blood status, her looks, her grades, her
personality, her very existence to be honest. The teachers all love her, and she’s always been a bit of a loner for a Gryffindor~”

“That’s because she’s a Ravenclaw.”

“That’s beside the point. You’ve been mean to her since forever, yes she can be annoying but so can everyone else in this school. You are her most vocal critic, and she, yours.”

Draco flopped onto the bed and groaned, “Is there a point to this?”

Harry paused, and licked his lips, “I-- uh... Maybe?”

“You sure about that? Cause to me it sounds like you’re rambling about how Granger and I are rivals.”

Harry snorted, “You are though. You’re similar in quite a few ways and you clearly hate each other, but I’m also pretty sure the two of you would be down for an intense hate fuck.”

“Merlin’s taint, Harry.”

“You said as much yourself that you would have her as a mistress.”

“I may have said this, and I may still be willing if that ever happened, but I still don’t know why you’re going on about this.”

Harry sighed, “I just think you should be nicer to her, especially when she comes back from St. Mungo’s. If the two of you were both halfblood’s I know you could somehow make some sort of... I don’t know... friendship.”

“Well, for that to happen we would have to be in some sort of crazy alternate reality, and that is clearly not the case, but I think I understand what you are saying.”

Harry let out a sigh of relief, “Oh good.”

“You want me to be nice to her when she gets back and is still a bit loopy, and bring her over to our side with the power of seduction. No one can say no to the power of the Malfoy penis.”

“That is one hundred percent not what I was trying to say.”

“Doesn’t matter. I’m going to do it. Her and I will have a nice heart to heart where I tell her that I like to play with things beneath my station, and she’ll tell me that she likes to get naked, wear expensive jewellery and then yell at me until I am rock hard and then I can punish her with my dick.”

Harry dropped his head back against the headboard and tried to burn that mental image out of his head, “Compared to you, what Tom and I do is completely boring and pedestrian.”

Draco leaned in, “Really?! I thought he would be into like a ton of total kinky things. He’s rich, handsome, can have all the basic sex that he wants, and he doesn’t even make you wear women’s lingerie, high heels and have you step on his balls?”

Harry’s mind went blank, imagining it with complete detail, “I... Draco... Are you okay in the head?”

“Of course I am. I just have clearly defined desires for my partners.”

“Do-- Do you want someone to wear high heels and step on your balls?”
Draco was silent for a minute, “I don’t think I’d want them to step on them, but I think a few near misses and the threat of it would drive me to the next level of arousal.”

“I have learned so much about you today that I never want to know.”

“And you can’t blackmail me about it either.”

“I can’t?”

“I am completely unashamed about it.”

“You should be.”

“I’m not though.”

Harry chuckled, and shook his head, “You’re such a menace.”

Draco’s arm shot up into the air in celebration, “Yes!”

Harry raised a brow, sitting up on his elbow, “What?”

“I made you smile,” Draco replied with a happy grin on his face, “You’re my friend and I don’t like to see you moping. She’ll be back in a few days and you can watch me seduce her. You will be very impressed.”

Harry tried not to let the smile fade from his face, given that Draco had actually tried to cheer him up, “Thanks, Draco. I look forward to it.”

##

James slid into Lily’s quarters at Hogwarts, and eyed his wife. She was sitting on the couch, her legs tucked up beneath her and a cup of tea in her hands. Her eyes were red-rimmed from crying, and a heaviness seemed set on her shoulders.

He sat down and wrapped his arms around her, “I’m sorry.”

“I feel like I’ve betrayed him,” she whispered and rested her head on his shoulder.

James couldn’t say anything, he felt the same. The choices that Harry had made over the last few months had been more than questionable, but with what had happened with Hermione they needed to know if Harry had done something untoward.

“I used Priori Incantatem on his wand while he was sleeping,” Lily stated and took a drink from her mug before setting it on a side table and wringing her hands.

James’ heart quickened, he almost didn’t want to hear the answer, he didn’t want his son to be a criminal. “...And?”

Lily pulled out a piece of parchment with a hastily written list on it.

Muffliato

Ventus

Scourgyf
James pursed his lips as he looked at the last fifteen spells that Harry had performed. A part of him, the auror part, looked at the use of muffliato and ventus and wondered if Harry used the wind spell to push her down the stairs and muffliato to silence her as she did so. The part of him that wasn’t a completely suspicious bastard would easily argue that Harry had used ventus to clear the fresh snow away on the path to Hogsmeade and used muffliato to keep their privacy while in the Three Broomsticks.

There were no illegal spells here.

“Harry didn’t hurt her. I don’t think he has it in him to hurt his friends like that James, and both of us thought the worst of him. Thought it enough that you asked me to check his wand and I did.” Lily said, her voice low and raw, “I can’t do this anymore James. I can’t be involved in your misgivings about our son,” Lily stood up and pulled away from him, “Please don’t ask me to do anything like this again. We both crossed a line today.”

James nodded, even if she couldn’t see him do so, her gaze on the flames that flickered in the fireplace.

He whispered, “I understand.”

They remained in silence for a few minutes, the only sound in the room was the fire and their undeniable guilt.
“I checked his wand even after I used legilimency on him,” she said quietly, so quietly that James barely heard her.

He didn’t move, he could barely hear her over the sudden pounding of his heart, “Why?”

“I don’t know,” she twisted a strand of hair around her index finger, “I know he didn’t hurt her on purpose, that he couldn’t do so, but I still doubted him. I am the worst mother.”

James got up and wrapped his arms around her tight, “No, you’re not. You’re an amazing mother. I’m sorry. I’m so sorry. It’s not fair for me to put you in this position and it never has been. I won’t do it again.”

Instead of melting into his embrace as she usually did, Lily was stiff and unmoving, “I’m not going to tell you to choose a side, James. We both know that Lord Slytherin cannot be trusted and that Harry’s judgment is compromised as long as he is with him. All I ask of you is for you to keep Harry out of it. Don’t capitalize on your relationship with him, don’t use him, don’t investigate him. Leave him out of this. Even if he puts himself in your way. You must leave him alone or I will never forgive you. He is my son first and foremost and I love him above all else.”

She turned and her eyes blazed more furiously than any hearth than any bonfire, hotter than fiendfyre, “I will not ask you to make an unbreakable vow,” Lily grabbed his hands and squeezed them tight, “but if any harm befalls him you shall feel the full brunt of a mother’s curse.” She released his hands, “Now get out of my room. I can’t bear the sight of our shared betrayal.”

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the wait on this one! Was out of town for a few weeks and it took a while to get back into writing.
Hope you enjoyed this chapter!
February 27th, 1998.

Tom swept into the room and sat down between Avery and Flint, across from Nott, “Gentlemen.” He said stiffly.

"What have you called us here for?" Nott grumbled, "If it's anything to do with your pet half-blood and his mudblood you can dig yourself out of that, without our help."

“Nott, please compose yourself before our King.” Avery said with a small smirk, “I’m sure Tom wouldn’t trouble us with something as simple as that.”

Tom’s lips pursed, “It’s amazing how the news can get around for a student falling down some stairs. No, I have called you here as I think it’s time that we get the press under control.”

“Under control? The Prophet is ash.” Flint said.

"Witch Weekly has become rather political since then." Avery replied, "As have a few others, which is rather surprising. Tom is right. Do you have any suggestions, Tom?"

Tom tried not to bristle at the repeated use of his given name, on Avery's lips it sounded like the low born name it was in front of these purebloods, "I have some thoughts on the subject if we tried to take over the media via force it would not go well. The Wizengamot would be quite troublesome and the lighter side of the Sacred 27 would raise a stink on us seizing the press.”

"We could do it anyways and silence any dissenters," Nott said.

“It would be rather troublesome in my opinion, I would prefer something where they hand over control to us.”

Flint chuckled and sat back, threading his fingers together across his stomach, “I am skeptical of that happening.”

“The fact is we have already arranged to purchase the majority of the Prophet’s shares will assist when it returns to publication but I wish to seize the press entirely and be able to censor it as I see fit.”

Flint nodded, “Isn’t that the dream? What are you thinking of doing?”

Tom felt a Cheshire cat-like grin stretch across his face, "A simple false flag operation. We have someone who is working in Witch Weekly make a few inflammatory articles, and then from there, we imperius a few people from our opposition to attack some of ours. Have them say Witch Weekly
incited them to violence against our base. We arrest the staff, push through some quick legislation that gives us the right to censor and inspect all media indefinitely."

"It's a good plan," Nott muttered with a small nod.

"Of course it is. I thought of it." Tom snapped.

Nott rolled his eyes, "I wouldn’t consider being associated with the Potter brat as a good idea on your part, but I guess we must take into account your rather poor heritage."

Tom rose quickly to his feet, ready to hex the bastard into a heart attack--

"Gentlemen!" Avery slammed his cane on the floor, "Now is not the time to for this!"

Flint sighed, "The two of you need to end this spat. This is a time for action and not bickering. I approve of this plan. I know someone who would be ideal to imperius at Witch Weekly. Avery, if you could come up with what should go in the paper I will arrange for it to start going into print soon."

"Of course."

"Nott, I want you to make a list of people from our side who can be attacked and if they died it wouldn’t be too much of an issue. We can decide a bit later on who will be attacking."

Nott laughed and sat up, "No."

The three men frowned and said in unison, "No?"

"I already have a much better idea," Nott looked at Tom, "And you’ll love it."

The three men listened to Nott’s idea.

Nott was right, Tom did love it.

Lily entered Dumbledore's office, well, it was Minerva's now, but to her, it would always be Albus's office. Little had changed when Minerva had moved into it, except to remove the odd spindly figurines, they had likely been sent to Aberforth.

Lily looked to the portrait’s behind the desk and did not see Albus amongst them. She wished she could talk to him right now. Some form of him at least.

Despite how busy he had been with all his responsibilities Albus had always been able to make a moment for her and offer a sympathetic ear or a kind word of advice, but now he was gone somewhere she couldn't reach him.

Now Lily didn't really have anyone to talk to; James was working against Slytherin, Severus was working for him, Harry was sleeping with him, Alice and Frank weren't the best listeners in the first place and with Frank in recovery there was even less contact with them, the McKinnon's had been travelling for research for the last three years, and generally she tried not to let the other professor's know too much about her life. They had known her and James almost their entire lives and she didn't want them to see her marriage fall apart.

The door opened behind her and Minerva entered the room and stared at her in surprise. "Oh, Lily,"
Minerva shook her head, “I forgot that I called you here. Please sit.”

The urge to go out and get the older woman a cup of tea with some whiskey in it was high. Minerva’s eyes didn’t even have bag’s but luggage under them they were so heavily lined, not that Lily would ever let her know that she looked anything less than dignified.

Lily sat across from Minerva, who was setting down a pile of parchment on the desk, “Do you have any news on Hermione? It’s been almost a week since she was taken to St. Mungos.”

Minerva pursed her lips, "I do, but there are a few things I would like to discuss first."

Lily shifted, if the news on Hermione could wait then the girl was probably fine. “Am I here as Professor Potter or Harry’s mother?” She asked carefully. There was a significant distinction between the two roles, one Minerva was more than familiar with.

Minerva rested her hands on the desk, “You will always be Lily to me, but right now we will discuss issues that pertain to the school,” Minerva looked at the parchment on the desk. “Before Albus’s death, he hired Severus Snape as the Defence Professor, I am rescinding that offer. I know that whatever deal that Albus worked out with him it was not for the student’s benefits but for political machinations.”

Lily nodded. She understood completely why the decision had been made, “Severus is my friend but I feel his disposition does not allow for teaching children, more like traumatizing them.” He had certainly managed it with his schoolmates back in the day.

“Precisely, I am now forced to look for a new Defence professor as well as a Transfiguration one.”

Lily’s eyes widened, “What? You-- oh, yes. You’re headmistress now. Of course.” It was hard to come to terms with the fact. Lily loved Minerva but this office belonged to Albus.

"I cannot fulfil both roles adequately and we still have four more months of school. While replacing me in the middle of the year would be disruptive it would be better if I could focus on administrative duties.” Minerva's hand gently brushed over the parchment

That was an understatement of the century, the 7th years would riot if they lost their teacher right before NEWT’s, “I could pick up some of your classes, I’m sure Filius and Pomona would as well. I know we would be happy to help with administration. The Board would probably be more than happy to hire an assistant to help.”

"Albus preferred to run a tight ship and I think it would be best to follow in his steps. We don't need to inundated with a host of potential spies..." Minerva paused and gave Lily a smile that failed to reach her eyes, "But thank you, I believe I have it managed for now. There is one duty that I would like to pass off to you. I want you to be the head of Gryffindor.”

Lily felt her jaw drop. For some reason, she had never thought about being a head of house, but it made complete sense. She snapped her jaw closed, "I-- Of course. Thank you. I will."

Minerva nodded, her shoulder’s seemed to have released some tension, “I would like to table another request of you.”

Lily raised a brow and sat forward, “Oh?”

“I was hoping you would be willing to ask James if he would like to apply for the Defence position.”

The jaw threatened to fall open again. Severus would probably pitch a fit at being passed over for
James and she wasn’t sure she wanted to work with James at the moment. He would be good at it if he could learn to treat Slytherin students fairly. “I can ask. I don’t know if he would want to give up his job at the Ministry.”

Minerva’s lips thinned to the point they vanished, “I was told that James is currently on probation.”

Lily felt her eyebrows rise into her hairline, she had most definitely not heard this, she attempted to play it cool. “It doesn’t mean he’s fired. He loves his job, but I will ask. Do you have anyone in mind for Transfiguration?”

Minerva’s expression soured, “I have already received several applications. Regulus Black, Narcissa Malfoy, Rudolphus Lestrange, and Evan Rosier.”

Lily could barely believe her ears, is this what a stroke felt like? “I’m sorry I must have misheard you, did you say Narcissa Malfoy?”

The older woman sniffed the air, “Indeed. Apparently, since Draco will be graduating she has claimed that she would like to do something outside of being the mistress of the house. The other three decided they wanted to put their businesses and house matters to the side as they just suddenly need to teach,” Minerva threaded her fingers together, “If you have any suggestions I am of course open to them, and I am certain when the news gets out that I have rescinded the job invitation for the defense position I will also be getting many applications for it.”

“Well, we can certainly say that Lucius Malfoy wasn’t the force behind this,” Lily bit back a chuckle, “I imagine when Lord Slytherin suggested this idea Lucius probably pouted for a week— I have an idea for the Defence job.”

Minerva leaned forward, “I will take anyone with a pulse at this point.”

This time Lily did manage a chuckle, “Frank. He might be a hard sell for doing it for the rest of his life, but maybe you could offer it to him as a few years out of the Ministry and he can take it easy as he recovers.”

Minerva leaned back in her chair and a smile bloomed on her face, “That... is a very good idea. Twenty points to Gryffindor.”

“Isn’t that cheating?”

Minerva shrugged, “I don’t really care at the moment.”

Time to push her luck with being able to suggest employee’s, even if this one was mostly in jest. “Sirius might be willing to take on Transfiguration.”

Minerva’s face went blank and her complexion went sallow as if living through some traumatic memories, “No. Absolutely not.”

“Imagine him and James working on the same staff. Wait, no, Sirius and Severus.”

“Lily, I already lived through that once, I don’t know if my heart could take it.” Lily would swear that she saw Minerva shiver with fear at that thought.

“Sirius is very good at Transfiguration.” Lily continued to wind her up.

“I would rather hire Bellatrix Lestrange as a nanny.”
“Sirius will be heartbroken when I tell him this.” Lily opined.

A finger pointed right at her face, “Don’t you dare.”

“Remember his face when he asked you to go as his graduation date and you turned him down? He moped so much that James and Remus were worried that he would throw himself off the astronomy tower. I don’t know if he could handle another rejection.”

The smallest smile broke through Minerva’s cool facade, “I will never forgive you.”

"Don't worry," Lily winked, "I'll keep this between us... But I will ask around for you."

“Thank you,” Minerva sighed and brushed her hand over the parchment again, “Now, regarding Miss Granger...”

Harry rested his head on his cheek, listening to Flitwick’s lecture. The last week had been stressful. The Hufflepuff’s and Ravenclaw’s had left him alone for the most part, rumours and whispers had followed him as he went through the hallway. Draco had thrown his weight around with those two houses to prevent them from opening hostilities with the Slytherins.

The Gryffindors had thrown a hex or two his way and had met with swift Slytherin retaliation. A large part of Harry didn’t want to cause a deeper divide between the houses but with the other three being against Slytherin, on an apparent moral level, all attacks needed to be answered back in kind.

A knock resounded through the room, the class turned as the door opened and his mother stuck her head in, “Filius, could I borrow Harry?”

Flitwick smiled, his bushy eyebrows moving as he did so, “Of course. Make sure to get a copy of someone’s notes Mister Potter.”

Harry nodded, and shoved his books into his bag and headed into the hallway. His mother had pulled back into an alcove and gestured for him to join her inside. As he approached he saw that her eyes were red-rimmed, she had clearly been crying, "Mum? What's wrong?"

She pulled out a handkerchief and dabbed at her eyes, “Minerva gave me news about Hermione.”

He wasn’t an idiot, her face said it all, but hope sprung eternal. “Is she coming back soon?”

“No,” Lily gripped his shoulders, “She’s been moved to the Janus Thickey ward.”

Harry’s knees shook, “What?” The Janus Thickey ward was for people who had been permanently damaged. He fell back against the wall. He must have overpowered the spell, or maybe the spell combined with the injury--

"They're working with her, but for the meantime she is to stay at St. Mungo's."

Harry looked away from her, anywhere but her out of fear of her seeing his guilt, “She only fell down the stairs... We’re magic. She should be able to be fixed.”

Lily tightened her grip on his shoulder, “I’m sorry.”

Harry shook her hand off, “No. This is wrong. McGonagall must have gotten a wrong message.” He muttered and shook Lily’s hand off. “I need to see her,” He said quietly and bolted, down the stairs,
through the halls and out the doors, ignoring a prefect that yelled at him. He didn’t care if he got in trouble.

Harry kept running, even if it was cold, even if the cold iron of the gate burned his hands as he scaled the gate, even if his ankle twisted beneath him when he landed. He would not stop until he saw.

He disapparated to London nearly landing on a muggle woman, but he barely noticed. His mind reeled.

He couldn’t have hurt her so badly.

He didn’t have it in him.

He wasn’t a bad person.

He loved her.

She was his friend.

Harry barely thought as he entered the hospital, skipping the front desk, and brushing past the orderly that tried to stop him as he ascended the stairs, climbing to the fourth floor. Everything that drove him was instinct. He looked at the names on the doors, nearing the end of the hallway when he saw H. Granger, at the bottom of a placard with three other names.

He didn’t knock, just pushing his way into the room, where he spotted Hermione sitting on a chair looking out the window with a thick book open on her lap.

“Hermione!” He tried not to shout, but the relief that flooded him at seeing her with a book was palpable. If she had a book she was fine.

Same old Hermione.

She turned and smiled, “Harry! What are you doing here?” Hermione waved him over.

He slunk through the room, ignoring the looks from the other people and sat across from her, “I’m visiting you. I wanted to see you.”

“Thank you, it’s nice to see you.” Her brow crinkled and she took Harry’s glasses off his nose and cleaned them with her sleeve before returning them.

“Are you okay?” He asked quietly, resting a hand on her knee.

She shrugged and looked at the book on her lap. “I don’t know how I got here.”

Harry did his best to ignore the racing of his heart, “You fell down the stairs and hit your head. I take it you don’t remember that?”

“No.” Hermione gave the hand that was on her knee a look and he pulled it back.

He licked his lips. Her not remembering was all part of the plan. “Do-- do you remember before that? You met with me and Tom at the Three Broomsticks earlier that day.”

“Tom?”

“Er- Lord Slytherin.”
Hermione looked genuinely surprised at that, her eyes wide and brows raised, “Lord Slytherin? A descendant of the Slytherin line? That line died out centuries ago.”

Harry felt his jaw begin to shake, she didn’t remember Tom at all? How was that possible? He just wanted her to forget what she had learned about Tom. “He-- he’s the king of magical Britain.”

Hermione leaned forward, gripping the book tightly, “But-- How? The Sacred 27 would never agree to that! They would never give up their leverage over the Wizengamot and Ministry.”

His mouth was dry as he answered, "They did agree. The vote was over 60 per cent. He hasn't been crowned yet..."

Hermione turned back to the window, her expression was the one she wore when she was attempting to work out a particularly tricky question.“How long have I been here?” She asked slowly.

His fingernails bit into the flesh of his palm. How could he have done this to his friend? “Less than a week.”

“I don’t understand,” she whispered.

They didn’t say anything. Harry had nothing to say to her. He couldn’t tell her about everything that happened. He couldn’t tell her the history of the last few years. He couldn’t do anything except impotently live with the fact that Hermione would have to relearn everything from the last few years.

Harry didn’t even want to know what was going through her head. So many questions about Tom probably. Maybe stress from NEWT’s. She would be able to catch up though, maybe she would graduate a year behind but if anyone could deal with having some common knowledge wiped from her head it was Hermione.

All he had to do was make sure that she didn’t rediscover anything about Tom... Not that she would. All the evidence would be gone by the time she got back to Hogwarts.

This was just a little bump in Hermione’s path and she would overcome it with ease. Harry knew she would and he would be with her as she did so.

Harry grasped her shoulder, ready to head out and tell her that he would be back to visit, “Hermione?”

She turned quickly, her eyes lighting up in surprise. “Harry! What are you doing here?”

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the delays. Real-life stuff and I've been writing other stuff, I hope to be able to work on two things at once one day. Love you all!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!