Unmasked

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Summary

Harry’s fifth year isn't going so well; both his friends are prefects, leaving him to defend himself against everyone calling him a liar or lunatic, another teacher joined Snape in the 'hates me' category, and Dumbledore's avoiding him like the plague. Deciding to distract himself, he decides to do his work in the library one night where he meets an unlikely ally.

Notes

Hello everyone. This a fic I am writing with Nemiriel, who recently had their account activated. This will be a Joseph Duskgem (my oc)/ Harry fic. For those who read or following my other works, you know who Joseph is.

Do not be alarmed, those of you who are following my other fics. Since I am writing this with Nemiriel, this will not take up too much of my time, and distract me from the other fics.

We both hope you'll all enjoy this fic as much as we enjoy writing it.
Chapter 1

Harry entered the library, hating that he had to do his work without either Ron or Hermione. He couldn't really blame them since they were prefects.

_Ron; a prefect._ Harry snorted at the thought and sighed. This was exactly the attitude that made Ron, Hermione, and practically everyone else avoid him. Ever since his encounter with Voldemort, he's been having these strange mood swings. One moment he could have a perfectly normal conversation but then something would set him off, and like how Snape could turn nasty from just condescending with a few words, his mood would take a sharp turn. He would get angry and irritated with zero patience and sometimes he could swear it felt almost alien, as if the emotions weren't his to begin with. Of course it didn't help that Dumbledore was avoiding him, or that the number of teachers he hated at the school had increased to two, or that everyone else was either avoiding him or calling him a lunatic. Let's not forget the fact that he, who had saved the school from disaster several times now, apparently wasn't good enough to be a prefect this year either.

Sighing, he stopped in front of a shelf. The book he wanted was two shelves up and when he reached out his open hand, the book barely moved. He tried again, and nothing happened. Getting annoyed, he brought out his wand and casted a Summoning charm on the book, but it only made the large tome shake.

"Accio book!" Harry yelled.

The book finally flew into Harry's hand, but it took four others with it.

"Really? Someone who can't get a book out properly faced the Dark Lord three times and survived?" Someone said.

Harry turned to see a male seated beside the wall looking at him. He was tall, fit, and pale. He had short black hair, which was combed neatly to one side, amber eyes that hid behind silver, rectangular glasses, and his pointed face was expressionless. What Harry noticed next was the Slytherin crest on the other person's robes and he sneered.

"What do you care?" Harry asked as he began picking up the books.
"Just curious." The other male admitted as he stood, walking towards Harry. "If you can't do everyday tasks properly, it's amazing that you faced You-Know-Who three times, and lived to tell the tale."

Harry looked up and glared at the Slytherin, who still was looking at him with the same emotionless expression. They stared at each other for a while before the Slytherin took out his wand and waved it, making all the books, except the one Harry wanted, return to the shelf. Harry stood and kept his gaze on the taller raven. He looked to be an inch and a half taller. What he found confusing about this person, however, was that he had not insulted him or called him a liar. In fact, he said that he believed him, indirectly. Watching warily, Harry thanked the Slytherin and took the seat next on the opposite wall. He opened the book and began reading about moonstone, grumbling, complaining, and groaning every few minutes.

"If it's not too much of a bother, could you read more quietly?" A voice asked so suddenly it made Harry jump.

He turned to see Slytherin standing next to him. He wondered how he got so close without him noticing.

"Do you have superhuman hearing?" Harry asked.

"We're in the row that borders the Forbidden Section." The Slytherin pointed out. "It's near the end of the library, no one really comes here, and it's our, fifth years' free period on a Friday. Do you really think there'd be a lot of people in the library?"

"Well, it's not like you own the library." Harry said.

"Neither do you." The Slytherin returned. "So if you can't keep yourself from making noise and disturbing those of us who came to read in peace, then it would be appreciated if you just borrowed that book and left."

"It must be nice having the strictest teacher who handles the hardest subject favour your house." Harry spat. He had no real reason to be angry at the Slytherin, but he just was. It was yet again one of those moments when his patience suddenly vanished and he found it increasingly difficult to remain polite.

"It wouldn't be hard for you if you just paid attention and not talk to your friend during class." The taller raven pointed out. "All that favour does for us is keeping house points deducted during his
class. In fact he expects more success from us than anyone else. If anyone has a right to complain about Potions, its us, but we don't because we know that Snape being strict on us will help us in the long run. The rest of you just don't know how to listen."

"Well how do you expect me to listen to someone who keeps insulting me?"

"Well, why do you give him more reasons to insult you?"

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Majority of the time he insults you or calls you out on your mistakes, he compares you to your father, how he was so arrogant that he didn't pay attention in class, relying on his friends to help complete his work. That's what Snape sees when you don't pay attention in class. It gives him ammunition, especially since he knows your parents are a touchy subject."

"So what, do I start paying attention to him, even if I don't understand a single word he's saying?"

"All you have to do to understand what's going on is to read, pay attention, and listen. Do well in class and prove Snape wrong. That'll shut him up."

Harry took in a deep breath to stop his mouth from blurting anything too offensive. Then his mind finally registered the said words and he stared at the Slytherin. He was right; the thing that'll probably shut Snape up and put him in the foulest mood possible was to do well in the subject he taught.

"Thanks, I suppose." Harry said with a stiff nod.

"No problem." The taller male said. "You should stop associating the subject with the one teaching it. My father always thought I'd end up competing with Lily Evans's child for the top place in Potions class."

"Your dad knew my mom?" Harry asked, his irritation vaning.

"They were only in class together." The other male answered. "Since the first day, they competed to be the best. That competition only intensified once they were in their N.E.W.T. level class."
"I doubt I'll be able to get into the N.E.W.T. level classes if I can't even finish this essay." Harry sighed.

The Slytherin moved closer and scanned the page Harry was reading. Harry was confused when the other teen took a seat and started writing on a piece of parchment.

"Here." He said as he handed the parchment to Harry. "Those are the moonstone's main properties, what its most commonly used for, and which ingredients it works best with, and which one's it'll have a negative reaction to."

"Thanks, but why are you helping me?" Harry asked, now even more confused.

"Well, as much as I respect Professor Snape, I'd like to see what it looks like when he's proven wrong." The Slytherin answered with a smirk, making Harry smile slightly.

"You're in the same year as I am?" Harry asked and the other teen nodded. "Sorry, but I don't know your name."

"It's Joseph Duskgem." The taller male replied. "And don't worry about it. One of the perks of going unnoticed is that people tend to talk about secrets near you."

"Really, like what?" Harry asked.

"You didn't hear this from me." Joseph said. "But Susan Bones said that Ernie Macmillan saw Justin Finch-Fletchley go into one of the old, classrooms on the fifth floor with Michael Corner, and left ten minutes later sweaty, their hair disheveled, and looking like they put their clothes on in a hurry."

Harry chuckled, his good mood returning. That wasn't really surprising information. Ever since their second year and after Justin apologised for accusing Harry of being behind the attacks, the two had become friends. Harry eventually figured out that Justin was gay, and seeing him staring at Cedric proved him right.

"Well, I better get back to my common room." Joseph said as he stood. "Try not to displace any
more books."

"Not making any promises." Harry said with a small smile. Perhaps tolerable Slytherins existed anyway.

Joseph nodded before leaving. Thanks to Joseph's help, he finished his essay within the hour and he spent the rest of his day in a great mood.

Potions class was underway the next Monday. As the students worked on the assigned Potion for the day, Snape began handing out the essays, which he graded the first ten minutes of the class. As expected, he praised the Slytherins when he handed their papers back and insulted nearly every Gryffindor except Hermione, who he merely sneered at. Then the greasy-haired Potions Master stopped in front of Harry's and Ron's workstations.

"As expected, even with two days Weasley, you couldn't learn that moonstone would cause an explosion when mixed with dragon's blood, which is common knowledge. And you, Potter." Snape stared at Harry after handing Ron his paper.

Snape looked like he didn't know whether to sneer, smirk, or glare at Harry. After a few more seconds, Snape handed him his essay and Harry was surprised and pleased to see a grade of Exceeds Expectations.

"I suppose everyone can get lucky once in a while." Snape said. "Your father was lucky he had that leech Slughorn teaching him."

With that, Snape moved to the next station. If that was the best Snape could think of, the rest of class would probably be smooth sailing. Harry turned and saw Joseph being attentive to his potion. He was next to Malfoy, who looked as equally focused on his work. Harry returned to his work, focused, read the instructions on the board and his book and at the end of the class, all Snape could do was sneer at his bottled potion. Joseph was right behind him and he gave the Gryffindor a small nod and a smirk before handing in his finished product.

For the rest of the day, Harry was in a great mood. He didn't utter a single word in Umbridge's class. At dinner he even had a pleasant conversation with Ron and Hermione that didn't involve any of the usual rows about Harry and his problems. Having finished their meal, Ron and Hermione went to do their rounds and Harry headed for the library. Partly because of his assignments but mostly because he liked that quiet, unassuming place where not many people
would bother him. Maybe he also thought he’d run into Joseph again or whatever. He didn't know if it was from wanting to thank him, to see if he had any other ideas to rile Snape up, or just to talk to him. That last reason made him think; he wanted to talk to someone from Slytherin. Yup, he’s finally loosing it. Granted, Joseph wasn't exactly a git and didn't actually insult Harry. But still, you could never be too careful where the Slytherins are concerned. He always thought that most of them would turn out to be just like Malfoy. Then he realised that it was Ron who told him that, which was probably the only reason he didn't want to be put in Slytherin.

As soon as Harry entered the library, he headed towards the back and stopped at the aisle bordering the Forbidden Section.

"If you're here for help again, you're out of luck." Joseph said from his seat.

"Why's that?" Harry asked.

"You won't always be able to rely on others' expertise." Joseph pointed out. "You should learn to do things by yourself."

"Well, I do have work, but I don't need that much help in them." Harry said, taking the seat next to the Slytherin.

"Then why are you here?" Joseph asked with an eyebrow raised.

"Well, I'm here to study." Harry replied matter-of-factly and Joseph gave him a 'no shit' look. "And your company is more tolerable than that of someone who thinks I'm a liar or a lunatic."

Harry began working on his assignments while Joseph read a book, answering Harry's questions. Harry didn't need much help since his assignments were on Charms and Transfiguration, the two subjects he liked the most.

"So, why do you believe me?" Harry asked. "It's not like you have any reason to."

"But I also don't have a reason not to." Joseph replied. "Let's look at it logically; the Ministry is doing everything it can to stop any talk of You-Know-Who, be it by slandering your and Dumbledore's names in the papers, kicking out Dumbledore from the ICW and Wizengamot, sending one of their employees to teach here, and holding a criminal trial for a case of underage magic. Fudge is investing too much time and resources for it to be a lie. Besides, you don't look
like the person who'd lie about something as serious as that just to be in the spotlight."

Harry appreciated the Slytherin saying that.

"You don't think I like the spotlight?" Harry asked.

"Draco's been making out like you do." Joseph said. "But I doubt it. The reason you were in the spotlight to begin with was because of something tragic. Besides, I think Draco's just jealous because the spotlight's not on him."

Any cheerfulness present in Harry evaporated at that moment. His expression contorted into a sneer but it passed quickly and settled into a frown. "So, you're close to Malfoy?" Harry asked and Joseph nodded. "You're friends with Malfoy, figures... Do your parents...have the same..."

"I'm a pure-blood and my first name is Joseph." The taller raven stated. "So no, none of my family members are blood purists."

"What side were they on in the first war?" Harry asked bluntly.

"Neither." Joseph replied and Harry raised an eyebrow. "People think that in a civil war, there are only two sides fighting. But there are those who are fighting to make sure that the war doesn't destroy everything in our world."

"Alright, but I don't think they could've stayed neutral." Harry said, watching Joseph carefully.

"They were inducted as Death Eaters, but they had different loyalties from the start. They're masters at playing both sides. They gave information to You-Know-Who that seemed important, but wouldn't give him too much of an advantage. And they gave critical information to the Order."

“So, what do your parents do?”

“My mother is a member of the Wizengamot, and my father is a healer at St. Mungo’s.”
Harry returned to his assignments, noticing that the Slytherin looked a little uncomfortable. Although he might have been a little too straightforward, he wouldn’t take the words back. He and Joseph have only talked twice, after all. One does not go blindly trusting others, Harry learnt that at least. A few minutes after he finished, Madame Pince approached them and reminded them of curfew. The corridors were abandoned, so the two had no problem walking together, but they walked in a tense silence.

“Did I touch a sensitive topic earlier?” Harry asked.

“Yes, but it’s not that I have a bad relationship with my parents.” Joseph answered. “I have a great relationship with them. I just don’t like talking about what they did in the war, because it will eventually lead to me talking about…what they were forced to do.”

"I apologise." Harry said

“You don’t have to, you didn’t know.” Joseph said. “Besides, no one brings it up anymore except for the people who hate Slytherins for no logical reason.”

“Well, it was nice talking to you.” Harry said and Joseph nodded. “See you around.”

Joseph stared at Harry and just when the Gryffindor thought he’d say something back, the Slytherin only nodded again. He bade Harry good night before continuing down the staircase.
The rest of the week passed fairly quickly for Harry. Amidst all the chaos that was his life right now, the hours spent in library had become a well needed time-out. Ever since Joseph helped him with his essay, he and the Slytherin developed a certain routine of studying together in between breaks. They didn't talk about it; it was like some silent agreement between them, as both wanted solitude and didn't find the other's company bothersome.

As much as these peaceful hours helped him, his mood could still rival that of a pregnant woman’s. Fred and George helpfully pointed that out after they witnessed a particularly vicious spat in the corridors. That was a usual occurrence by now and Harry chose to ignore how wrong that train of thought sounded. At least he got to vent his frustrations in some way and as a result, he hadn't earned a single detention or loss of points for improper behaviour in classes that second week of school. He thought that if this kept up, he could keep his cool as long as Umbridge just kept making them read and copy lines. But the past four years should have indicated that the universe was against him

The next Monday morning came to be as sunny and slightly windy as all the days before. While having a friendly chat, Harry and Ron were making their way to the Great Hall when they were greeted by a furious looking Hermione as soon as they got to the Common Room. After a few more seconds, Harry noticed that everyone was in a mood nearly as foul as his brunette friend’s.

"What's going on?" Harry asked, his good mood beginning to slowly disappear.

“What else could be wrong except that foul, evil toad?!" Hermione nearly yelled, and pointed to the notice board, which a lot of students had gathered around.
Harry and Ron approached the board, and the raven felt the rest of his optimism drain away as he read what Hermione was referring to;

*Educational Decree No. 23: Dolores Jane Umbridge has been assigned the post of Hogwarts High Inquisitor.*

“Bloody hell.” Ron said and there were no better words to describe the situation.

Harry simply nodded mutely and the three friends headed to the Great Hall for a tense breakfast.

Harry, his friends, and frankly everyone but the Slytherins, reluctantly entered the Defence classroom for their lesson. It didn’t help Harry’s already foul mood how smug and superior Umbridge was looking at her seat. Harry admitted to himself that reading the interviews of parents about the Decree in the Prophet, especially the one done by the father of a specific blonde git, before the class was a bad idea.

“Open your books to Chapter Three and read in silence, and repeat until you have memorised it.” Umbridge said

*This is getting ridiculous* Harry thought as he gritted his teeth and glared at the cover of his book.

"Mr. Potter, are you incapable of opening your book to the assigned page?” The fake, sweet voice said, sounding much closer. Harry looked up to see the pink toad a few steps away

"Are you planning on teaching us anything useful this year at all?” He bit out, trying, and failing, to contain his rising anger.

"I can’t possibly think of anything else that you would need to learn to acquire a passable O.W.L. grade in this subject that isn’t in your book.” Umbridge replied, walking closer to Harry’s desk.

“T’m not talking about learning anything else.” Harry replied. “I’m talking about learning how to do things in this book.”

"We’ve had this conversation already, Mr. Potter, and I believe I cleared that matter sufficiently.” Umbridge stated, her fake sweet tone slowly disappearing. “And when speaking to me, you will
address me as Professor Umbridge.”

"I don't care! I'll say it again; this is rubbish, we need practical lessons if we want to be able to defend ourselves!” Harry almost yelled. The other students were already whispering to each other, mostly about him with wary or disdainful expressions, which only fuelled the growing rage inside him.

“Mr. Potter, I’ve said it before…” Umbridge began but Harry knew what she was going to say, and had had enough of it, interrupting the pink toad mid-sentence by slamming his hands on the table and standing up.

"No, why won't you just listen?! Why does the Ministry insist on being blind to everything?! I'm just going to repeat myself then – no, do not interrupt me! – Voldemort is BACK, get that through those thick skulls of yours and do something about it already!"

Other than Harry’s heavy breathing, the classroom was silent. The entire class was looking at him, which wasn’t new, but every single expression was of shock. Whether that shock was from realising he was telling the truth or that thinking that they were really in a classroom with a psychopath, it didn’t matter. Umbridge’s face was stark white with twin red blotches on her chubby cheeks. The sweet disposition Umbridge tried to pass off was gone and Harry knew he was screwed.

"Detention for a week, Mr. Potter.” Umbridge said pointedly. “Be in my office at eight tonight. Now report to your Head of House.”

Despite all that, Harry couldn't muster up an ounce of shame. He took up his bag, intentionally leaving behind his Defence book, and headed towards the door. As he walked, he got to see a few people’s expressions; Hermione looked both angry and concerned about him. Either way, he knew he was going to get an earful from her later. Ron gave him a small smile and two thumbs up underneath his desk. Then he saw Joseph, seated next to Theodore Nott in the back, staring at him with the same expressionless face he always had before sighing and shaking his head.

Harry walked down the corridor. He had just finished yet another week of detentions with Umbridge and unfortunately, he had one of his mood swings while writing with the blood quill. He was able to not say anything, but the anger made him write more quickly. Granted, he got out earlier than last time, but his hand hurt like hell. He was about to turn a corner and head back to the Gryffindor common room, but he realised that Hermione would see his hand, and pester him
into telling McGonagall or Dumbledore. Knowing they'd just start arguing again, he walked the other way towards the library.

It was strange, when Harry thought about it; of his own volition, he had gone more times to the library in the first two weeks of this year than all the time he went the previous four years. It was a place he could go to and not hear any talk about Voldemort, the Ministry, Umbridge, or himself. It must be the same reason why Joseph came to the library; majority of the Slytherins’ parents are either rich businessmen or powerful Ministry officials. The daily conversation in their common room must have been either stressful or boring, at best.

"Harry Potter, here on a Saturday night?" A quiet voice asked. "The world has gone mad."

"I realised that when I found one Slytherin who wasn't a pompous git." Harry returned.

"So why are you here?" Joseph asked when Harry sat. "As I recall, you already finished all your work yesterday."

"Perhaps I wanted a quiet night and trust me; the Gryffindor common room is not where you want to go for that." Harry said and Joseph smirked.

Ever since Joseph helped him with his Potions essay, Harry has been coming to the library every other break time, doing his work there, and even had pleasant conversations with the Slytherin, in which he learned a lot about the taller raven; despite his pure-blood upbringing, Joseph’s parents exposed him to the muggle world at a very young age. The taller raven even knew how to play a few muggle instruments and one night, he and Harry had a friendly debate about comic book characters. Harry's hostility towards him had nearly completely vanished. The only issue now were his friends. Harry could see himself hanging out with Joseph in the future, but the possibility of that happening was slim if he had to hang out with the likes of Malfoy or Parkinson as well.

"Perhaps." Joseph conceded and returned to his book.

Harry relaxed a bit and started rummaging through his bag, trying to make it look like he was searching for something to read. Judging by the growing smirk on Joseph's face, he wasn't fooling anyone. Realizing his acting was really quite ridiculous, he leaned back in his chair, his mind trying to come up with a topic for conversation.

"So" Harry began nervously. "How do you stand being around people like Malfoy?"
Not really an ideal conversation opener but he was indeed quite curious.

"He may be a git in your eyes, but I've known him since we were children." Joseph replied. "He's not as bad as you think."

"Really? The guy who keeps insulting me because I didn't choose to be his friend over the first person who was nice to me, and keeps insulting my closest friends because of their financial situation or their blood isn't that bad?" Harry stared, his voice incredulous.

"Well, better to be friends with him than an ignorant redhead." Joseph scowled and Harry scowled back. And here he was hoping for a laid-back conversation to get his mind off of Umbridge.

"Why don't you explain to me why that is?" Harry asked while he gritted his teeth.

"Draco wasn't always the git he shows himself as; there was a time when he was friendly, open-minded, and even curious about the muggle world." Joseph began. "Unfortunately, he's the only child to one of the oldest wizarding families in Britain and his father his a blood purist, not to mention a Death Eater by choice. He was brought up to meet several different sets of standards, as are all pure-blood children. If his father was out of the picture, he might have never turned out like this or he could stop with this whole charade."

"What about his mother?" Harry asked, trying not to seem bothered that the Slytherin nearly looked forlorn for a few seconds.

"Lady Narcissa cares about Draco and his well-being above anything else. She'll willingly defend him from any threat, be it the Dark Lord or a school boy he argues with." Joseph replied. "Weasley is a different story; his personality wasn't transformed due to pressure or his experiences. He's had the same personality and line of thinking he's had since our first year, possibly since he was a child."

"And what's wrong with that?" Harry asked.

"He doesn't have a good work ethic. If he fails at something, he believes he can just count on his friends to help him out of it or that his mummy will be there to comfort him. He's immature; he lets the simplest comments about his financial status elicit a significant reaction from him, which is why Draco keeps attacking him using that insult." Joseph explained, and as much as Harry wanted to hex the taller raven, he made some sound points. "Also, didn't he stop being your friend for a while last year because he thought you found a way to enter your name and didn't tell him?"

Harry glared at Joseph for a few minutes, before he nodded and sighed.
"That doesn't excuse Malfoy treating him like shit. Anyway, it's very easy to judge other's behaviour you know." Harry pointed out testily.

"And Weasley has no excuse for associating Draco to his father's mistakes." Joseph rebutted. "Nor is he right in associating all Slytherins and pure-bloods because they made up majority of Voldemort's followers."

"I'll concede to the point about Slytherins and pure-bloods, but how can you not expect Ron to hate Malfoy when he's just like his father, who treats Ron's dad like he's dirt?" Harry asked.

"Because he was taught to hate Malfoys just for having that name. He never bothered to question why he had to hate them in the first place." Joseph replied. "All pure-bloods have books on the histories of all pure-blood families, and there are some tomes in libraries. The Weasleys were actually quite wealthy in the past, nearly as wealthy as the Malfoys. At that time, the families didn't hate each other, and only competed when it came to their businesses. Like Arthur Weasley, his ancestor had a fascination with muggles and thought establishing trade with them would help gain more profit. Long story short, the muggle businesses the Weasleys invested in failed and they lost a substantial amount because of it, majority from paying debts. The following years, the Weasleys tried to invest in other businesses in the muggle community, but they ended up failing, causing them to lose more of their wealth. As the Weasleys watched their fortune disappear, they saw the Malfoys grow in wealth, power, and influence, and, due to sheer envy, blamed them for their failure."

"How'd that go for them?" Harry asked, feeling a bit intrigued despite himself.

"They blamed the Malfoys for setting up fake businesses, which the Weasleys invested in, and purposely failed them." Joseph said. "They also accused the Malfoys of cursing the businesses they invested in, and several other accusations involving dark magic. The courts couldn't find any evidence of foul play, and the Weasleys were made the laughingstock of the community. Ever since, the Weasleys and the Malfoys have been at each other's throats."

"So, was there really foul play?" Harry asked.

"No. The failure of the Weasleys' investments can be attributed to the nearly psychotic fascination with muggles, the lack of foresight of the former head of the family, and the fact that muggles at that time didn't want anything to do with magic. So it's understandable that they'd avoid shops funded by wizards and witches." Joseph replied. "I know he's your best friend, but do you really want to be friends with someone like that? Someone who blindly assigns blame because someone close to him told him to do so? Someone so immature that he'd think his best friend of four years, who always said that he never liked being the centre of attention or wanted to be in life threatening situations, would willingly submit his name for the Triwizard Tournament and get mad because he didn't tell him how to do it?"

"Oh no, don't make this about me now! And don't pull that shit about Malfoys being almost flawless here, the thought alone is ridiculous!" Harry yelled, glad Madame Pince was nowhere in sight.
“I never said that the Malfoys were perfect.” Joseph said. “Weasley may not be throwing insults left and right, but he’s just as bad.”

“Whatever the case, I’d still rather be friends with Ron.” Harry said. “At least I know he’ll never stab me in the back.”

Joseph did not reply and just stared at the Gryffindor blankly, and Harry tried he’s best not to seem bothered at the fact that nothing he says could elicit any expression from the Slytherin. Harry made to grab his bag and leave when he accidentally let his injured hand hit the table roughly. He winced and looked down at his hand to see the wound starting to bleed. Cursing the ugly toad even more, he made to leave when pale fingers grabbed his wrist. He wanted to pull back and leave but strangely, feeling the Slytherin's cool skin on his rapidly lessened his anger.

“How did you get this?” Joseph asked.

"Detentions with Umbridge.” Harry muttered, taken a little aback at the concerned expression on Joseph’s face

A ringing silence followed his statement and suddenly, Harry wished to be anywhere but in the library. Even Hermione's nagging would be better than this. Not that he cared what Joseph's reaction would be, why would he? He was then shocked again when Joseph began tending to the wound. He began by washing the wound by using Aguamenti. He then took out vial of purple liquid, and poured some on his handkerchief.

"This is going to sting slightly, alright?” He said.

Harry numbly nodded and Joseph slowly moved the handkerchief closer to the wound. When it finally made contact, Harry flinched a little at the pain that felt like hot water was being poured onto his wound. He then saw Joseph remove his tie and transfigure it into a bandage. The Slytherin brought out a vial filled with a light-blue liquid and poured it on one side of the bandage. He wrapped the bandage around Harry's hand and the Gryffindor felt his wound cool.

"Leave that on until you bathe before going to bed." Joseph instructed as he put his vials away. "After that, you can just replace it with a normal bandage."

“Thank you.” Harry nodded and stared at his bandaged hand.

With all the anger gone, Harry could clearly think and regret a bit how he acted earlier. However he also didn't like accusations towards his friend, no matter how some other information may be valid. It's not like anyone could choose the family there were born into. And if he was honest with himself, he thought dragging ancient history into the present time was quite overrated.
He opened his mouth to say something, but noticed Joseph staring at his bandaged hand. For the second time that night, he saw concern in those pair of amber eyes. He eventually saw that Harry caught him staring, and cleared his throat, his cheeks turning a faint shade of pink. After a few minutes, he bade Harry good night and left. As Harry watched the taller male leave, he wondered if Joseph was as much in control of his emotions as he made others believe.

Harry entered the Gryffindor common room and found Ron and Hermione on the couch. It looked like they were having a serious conversation. If it had anything to do with Umbridge, Harry wanted no part of it. It was late in the evening at the beginning of October and his scars from the toad were almost healed now, thanks to Joseph’s potion. He also somehow managed to not annoy the professor and therefore his evenings were finally detention-free. Unfortunately, his friends approached him as soon as Hermione spotted him.

“If this has anything to do with Umbridge, don't bother saying anything at all.” Harry said hastily.

“It isn’t…well, not completely.” Hermione replied sheepishly, but her face shifted to show concern and suspicion when she saw his hand. “Harry, you injured the same hand again?”

“This?” Harry asked and lifted his bandaged hand. “Peeves followed me around and knocked down some armour. A piece scratched my hand. Madame Pomfrey complained and wondered why Dumbledore hasn’t banished him yet.”

He had taken to wearing the bandage at all times, seeing as the white lines that spelled I must not tell lies were still fairly visible although the wound was closed. Unfortunately he never told his two friends the real story how he got the wound and therefore was quickly running out of excuses. Another thing was that he used the same bandage that Joseph transfigured his tie into; he just kept using Scourgify and disinfecting it. He didn’t know why he did it, but using it gave the Gryffindor a strange sense of comfort.

He made sure to conceal the bandaged hand in his robes as much as he could but if anyone would get suspicious it would be Hermione, naturally. While Ron nodded in understanding, Hermione didn’t look convinced. Luckily, whatever she and Ron were talking about mattered more than getting Harry to tattle on Umbridge.

“Harry, we were talking about our Defence classes and how we’re not going to learn anything useful at all this year if Umbridge remains in charge.” Hermione started.

“And we were thinking about looking for someone who’d teach us proper defensive magic. Not just reading from some bloody book all the time. Seriously, it's giving me a migraine just thinking
about it.” Ron grumbled and plopped back on the armchair.

"I get it, but who'd be willing to?" Harry questioned, shifting his weight on one foot. "All the teachers already have their own subjects to teach and Dumbledore is clearly too busy...I don’t even think Professor McGonagall would be willing to do it, no matter how much she hates Umbitch.”

"Ha, Umbitch, nice one Harry!" Ron laughed.

Hermione however paced the room and didn't appear to hear anything "...not necessarily a teacher...but someone who has some experience in using defensive spells all the same..."

"And who might that be then?" asked Harry.

The prefects shared a look that suggested he was being an oblivious idiot again, which he hated as much as their arguing.

“We weren’t thinking of asking a teacher...” Hermione admitted. “And then we thought of you.”

Harry’s eyes widened and he took a step back. "I – what?! You want me to teach you defensive spells?" The disbelief in his voice was almost palpable.

“Not just us, but anyone willing to learn.” Hermione replied.

“Hermione, I don’t think you’ve thought this all the way through.” Harry said, feeling both panicked and incredulous. “I’m no teacher. And who would possibly want me as one...everyone thinks I’m a nutter, remember?”

"I think they would reconsider that in favour of being able to actually learn how to defend themselves. Be it from You-Know-Who or any other threats.” Hermione returned smartly. “And I’ll take care of organising the lessons. All you have to do is show people.”

Harry just stared numbly at them. "You've really put some thought into this already."

"We dunno how you can’t see it mate. You've had the best marks in Defense since 1st year, hell, you've even beaten 'Mione here." Ron smiled at him crookedly.

"No, that's not true."

"Actually, you beat me in third year Harry." The brown-haired girl pointed out, smiling.
"Beside that you've faced You-Know-Who three times already and – wait for it – lived to tell the tale!" added Ron enthusiastically.

"Exactly. So who better to teach us than someone…"

"Stop! Stop it!" A mildly irritating stab of pain shot through his scar, making him wince slightly. Taking deep breaths, Harry rubbed his forehead tiredly and looked at his friends’ eager but slightly shocked faces.

"It's not that simple. What you don't understand is that this is school. And outside of that is the real world. So no matter how much you learn here…it is nothing, nothing, in comparison to what you'll face outside! You have no idea what it was like to face Voldemort all those times! It was mainly luck, I didn't – why are you…stop laughing! This isn't a game! Outside it doesn't matter how many spells you have memorised, the only thing that matters is your quick thinking! Being a better wizard or witch means nothing. Do you think Cedric was a lesser wizard because he didn't survive like me? I could as easily be the one dead back then at the graveyard but I was lucky enough to escape." Harry was panting when he finished his monologue and he had a full-blown headache now. But it was worth it; Hermione and Ron looked properly scolded.

"Mate…you know we didn't mean it like that." Ron had a scandalized look on his face.

"Harry don't you see…this is exactly why we need you to teach us, to tell us all these things…if we want to have any chances of beating V-Voldemort…"

Maybe it was her calm tone or the fact that this was the first time Hermione said his name, but Harry's anger suddenly evaporated and he slumped down on the couch feeling drained. It's not that he never thought about looking up some defensive spells by himself since the first dreadful DADA class. That’s his favourite subject for Merlin’s sake! He just never thought about teaching…anybody anything really. He wanted to point out that this is way more her territory but wasn’t sure he had any energy left to argue..

"I'll think about it." He didn’t know if it was due to their undying faith in him or pure Gryffindor stubbornness that they wanted to be taught how to fight and defend themselves by him.

“I know it’s a huge responsibility so take as much time as you need.” Hermione said gently. “But you must know better than anyone how much we need to be prepared…with every second You-Know-Who is getting stronger but our chances of surviving the upcoming war look no better.”

She then promptly pushed Ron off the armchair and dragged him towards the stairs that lead to dorms, leaving Harry in much needed piece to think. Despite everything he was curious if him teaching would improve or worsen his already pitiful reputation.
It had been a week since Ron and Hermione asked Harry to teach them defensive magic, and he was still extremely opposed to the idea. Not that he had much time to think about it mind you. Between classes, studying in the library and gruelling Quidditch practices he barely had time to get enough sleep, much less do some serious thinking. But he didn't complain, not now that Snape finally stopped glaring at him every second during lessons, mostly because he was probably too preoccupied with Umbridge monitoring his classes, and said professor seemed to grow bored of goading him. Despite being preoccupied he knew for sure that one of the reasons why he didn't want to teach was because he could be the reason why someone would die if they ever faced a Death Eater. Having so many people die for him already, the thought felt permanently lodged in his mind. He shook his head and concentrated on heading for the library. Soon he spotted Joseph heading in the opposite direction.

"Library's that way."

"I know." Joseph said, continuing to walk the other way.

Harry furrowed an eyebrow. "So why are you going that way?"

"Contrary to what you believe, I don't spend every second in the library." Joseph replied blandly.

"Where are you going then?"

"I was going to read by the Black Lake." The taller teen stopped to look at Harry.

"Would you mind if I came with you?" Harry asked tentatively.

Despite resuming their study sessions during the week, Harry still wasn't sure if Joseph had put their little argument from a while ago behind him. Not that he would ever be able to tell, he never met a person his age that had such a good poker face, almost on the same level as, let’s say, Snape. It was equally frustrating as was intriguing.

Really not the time to think about his face now Harry chastised himself and felt oddly nervous, like he was caught doing something he shouldn't have.

"No, but don't follow me too quickly." Joseph pulled him out of his thoughts, looking like he'd been pondering if it was a good idea. "Wouldn't want your friends thinking that you're friends with a backstabber."

Before Harry could think of a reply, Joseph was already walking down the stairs. He watched the Slytherin disappear and waited five minutes, ignoring a subtle twinge of guilt that had no business existing. He then pulled out the Marauders’ Map and found said Slytherin walking through
corridors into the Entrance Hall and towards the Black Lake. After clearing the Map, he stuffed it into his bag, took a deep, calming breath, and headed for the Black Lake as well.

When he got there, he found the Slytherin already reading underneath the shade of a tall, oak tree, on a hill overlooking the lake. Deciding not to ask about the comment earlier, Harry took out his books and began doing his work, thankful that there was at least silence. Although it wasn’t long before it began bothering Harry and the guilt that he felt earlier began pooling in his stomach again. True, he stopped bothering to understand his reactions after a few hectic weeks of school, but now he couldn’t even focus on his Transfiguration homework anymore. He shut his book and took a deep breath.

“Are you still mad about our fight?”

“Why would I be mad?” Joseph asked, taking his eyes off of the book.

“Well, we were defending our friends.” Harry began. “Things got intense, and some things were said that may have hurt.”

“I’m not mad.” Joseph reassured.

“Then what was with the ‘backstabber’ comment about earlier?” Harry asked, feeling a bit foolish.

“It was a joke.” Joseph said, a faintly amused expression on his face.

“Right.” Harry just stared. "So, when I made that comment last time, it didn’t bother you?"

“I know I didn’t look like it at the time, but it did bother me.” Joseph admitted. “I’ve just gotten used making my face expressionless when something I’m uncomfortable with comes up.”

No way, really?! Harry almost blurted out, but managed to stop at the last moment. It wouldn’t do well to get frustrated now, no matter how much he wanted to know Joseph’s reasons for putting up such a strong mask. “So, why did it bother you?” Harry asked instead.

“The situation in Slytherin is tense. The house is divided between You-Know-Who’s supporters, and the rest.” Joseph sighed, setting his book down. “Even amongst the supporters, there are people who are only doing it out of fear, and would jump at the chance to join the other side of the upcoming war. Basically, the reason your comment bothered me so much was because there’s truth in it; people I’ve known since I was a child, like Draco, Blaise, and Theo, I can’t trust them anymore.”

“That’s awful.” Harry said and couldn’t help but feel bad. He never really stopped to think how a house such as Slytherin might be affected by the upcoming war. Knowing that words weren’t really his strongest suit, he nervously moved closer to the taller raven and placed a comforting
hand on his shoulder. “I can’t imagine what I’d be like if I was in the same situation with Ron and Hermione.”

“Mother and father tried to prepare me this summer, but the experience is rougher.” Joseph admitted. “Back in the first war, they couldn’t trust anyone but each other.”

“At least they had each other.” Harry said, smiling slightly when Joseph looked at him.

The Slytherin’s gaze then fell to the hand resting on his shoulder. After a few seconds, he grabbed Harry’s wrist and mentioned at the bandage.

“Why are you still using this?”

“The marking hasn’t disappeared yet, so I’m using it to hide it from Hermione.” Harry replied.

“No, I meant why are you using the bandage that I transfigured from my tie?” Joseph asked, still staring at his hand.

Oh. Harry began to feel heat slowly creep up his neck towards his cheeks. He wanted to say he forgot but Joseph would definitely see right through it. “What do you mean?”

“This one is thicker than normal bandages.” Joseph explained. “I made it like that so that it wouldn’t rip when I poured the potion on it. If this was new, it’d be thinner.”

“W-W-Well, I just didn’t want anyone to see the bandage.” Noting Joseph’s raised eyebrow he quickly turned his blushing face towards the lake.

Smooth, Potter, smooth His mind groaned.

Harry wondered several things at that moment; he wondered why he was blushing so much, why he felt guilty for calling the Slytherin’s friends backstabbers, why he felt sad when he learned about his situation with his friends, and why his heart began beating faster when those pale, slender fingers wrapped around his wrist. And most of all, he wondered why in the name of Merlin did he not change that bloody bandage. Similar less than welcome thoughts were running rampant in his head but were swiftly pushed away.

“Anyway, why can’t you trust your friends anymore, but you trust me, someone who didn’t even know you existed until the start of this year?” Harry asked after his face cooled a bit, desperately trying to change topics.

“Well, I know you won’t rat me or my parents out to You-Know-Who.” Joseph said, releasing Harry’s wrist. “But I guess it’s mostly about being able to confide in someone. Keeping all your
problems inside, and not being able to tell a single person is exhausting. And I don’t know why I
confided in you, to be honest. It was just a feeling.”

Harry nodded as he felt his face heat up, again. With the air cleared, Harry opened his book and
resumed his work. Surprisingly, the next few minutes passed in a much welcomed relaxed silence.
He only noticed that he was still sitting next to Joseph when he finished his Transfiguration
assignment. Not wanting to bother the calm and relaxed atmosphere, Harry took out a book on
defensive magic he borrowed from the library. Even though he was still against teaching other
people how to defend himself, he admitted that he was curious as to what kind of spells would be
thought in a class like that. He was immediately hooked on the book, since it discussed a lot of
spells like the Shield Charm.

Some time had passed and it seemed that he had fallen asleep at one point. He didn’t want to fully
wake up yet since he was very comfortable. There was a cool breeze blowing against his face and
a warm sense of comfort enveloped him. However he soon grew restless, something nagging at
the back of his mind. Slowly opening his eyes he saw the clear sky and the Black Lake glistening
in the afternoon sun, which indicated that it was still pretty early and nowhere near near dinner time.
He immediately tensed up, realising where he was and who he was with before he had fallen
asleep. They had a particular long break this afternoon otherwise they couldn’t afford spending
time outside. He tensed up even more when he realised he was resting his head on Joseph’s
shoulder and was about to apologise when he saw that the Slytherin had fallen asleep as well, and
had half his face buried in the Gryffindor’s hair.

Harry relaxed, but began blushing immediately and then felt relieved that Joseph wasn’t awake
yet. His brain told him to pull away, but something else resisted. He didn’t know why, but he felt
extremely comfortable, as if everything at that moment just fit.

He watched the scenery sitting as still as he could, not wanting to wake up Joseph. It didn’t matter
though, a few minutes later he felt shifting and then suddenly the weight disappeared. Feeling the
awkwardness in the air, he quickly shut his eyes and pretended to be asleep. Joseph either bought
it or didn’t bother commenting at all because Harry soon heard the scratching of the quill.

Some time later when the scribbling stopped, Harry finally opened his eyes and made a show of
waking up and yawning for good measure.

“Slept well?” He heard an amused voice. Joseph was looking at him knowingly. Damn he thought that was convincing.

“Yeah, that did wonders to my sanity.” Harry replied as nonchalantly as he could. His face felt
hot again, especially when he locked eyes with Joseph. It was quite ridiculous really.

“So, er… Hermione and Ron want me to teach them defensive spells.” He quickly clamped his
mouth shut, horrified. Again he didn’t think and blurted the first thing in desperation to redirect the
conversation. But why did he choose this one particularly was beyond his understanding. Harry
knew now that Joseph wouldn’t rat him out to the other Slytherins, however he also knew that his
two Gryffindor friends wouldn’t be thrilled to discover he already divulged a supposed secret.
"And?"

At this point, Harry realised what the taller teen meant earlier about having the feeling that he could trust him, despite not having a long history with each other. The next few minutes consisted of Harry talking about Hermione’s plan to have him teach other people defensive magic and the reasons why he thought it was a bad idea.

"Among all those reasons, what's holding you back the most?" Joseph asked once Harry was done.

"I guess it's that I could be responsible if one of them dies." Harry rubbed his forehead. "Sure, it'd be a Death Eater that kills them, but I may not have taught them properly or enough."

"That's not something you should worry about." Joseph said firmly and Harry looked at him. "Yes, as a teacher, it will be your job to teach them the basics. But it'll be their responsibility to practice and learn more outside the lessons."

"Yeah, but..." Harry began to protest, but Joseph's serious gaze stopped him.

"Do you think we're better off with Umbridge?" Joseph asked, and Harry immediately shook his head. "Then do it. It's better for people to have a small chance of surviving with you, rather than having no chance with Umbridge."

Harry looked towards the lake, hiding the indecision on his face.

"Look, I know we haven't known each other as long as you've known Hermione or Weasley, but I've gotten the impression that you're someone who cares a lot about others." Joseph stated. "You're going to be a great teacher, Harry."

Harry's eyes widened and heat immediately returned to his cheeks.

*He just called me 'Harry'. Okay okay, just be cool about it. Why am I getting so worked up?* Harry tried to calm himself.

He saw Joseph’s hand twitch and for a second it looked like he wanted to reach out, but made no move in the end.

"Hypothetically speaking, if I were to teach a group of people defensive magic, would you attend?" Harry asked, turning to look at Joseph again.

"Well, I won't be able to attend as often as everyone else, since my housemates will get suspicious. But it'll be fine since I know a lot of defensive magic already. I can even teach some first aid spells." Joseph offered as he stood and picked up his bag. "Hypothetically speaking, of course."

Harry followed suit a few minutes later, smiling to himself as he made his way back towards the
castle. He may not have known it yet, but he was slowly starting to realise why a single conversation with the Slytherin helped him make a decision sooner, and why a week’s worth of nagging from his friends didn’t.
Greetings from the dead. But seriously, we apologise for the extreme lateness of this update. Both Nemiriel and I got extremely busy and suffered extreme writer's block. We promise to update at least once a month. We also have brought on another person to collab with us. So, again we apologise and we hope you enjoy the chapter.

Chapter 3

“I’m glad you’ve finally come around, Harry.” Hermione stated as she, Harry, and Ron walked out of the Potions classroom. “The sooner we get started, the better.”

Harry had told them just before class started that he had agreed to teach them defensive magic, but omitted the part about how he came to that decision, which Hermione was about to ask when Snape entered the room. Harry never thought he’d be glad to see Snape, but he knew that would be the only time. Harry then let his mind wander to the memory of him and Joseph talking by the Black Lake, and how the Slytherin helped him make a decision in one afternoon. He also thought about the feelings the taller raven made him feel, more specifically when he made Harry’s heart beat faster and heat creep up his neck.

“We should start looking for basic spells.” Hermione suggested, but then looked at Harry. “Harry, are you alright? You seem distracted.”

“Yeah mate.” Ron agreed. “You were like this in the morning. I mean, you could’ve told us at breakfast that you decided to teach us, but you were so distracted, you waited until now.”

“I’m sorry guys. But just because I’ve agreed…doesn’t mean I don’t have reservations about all this.” Harry said, hoping his friends would buy his excuse.

Hermione looked on the fence, as always. In the same way Harry thought that he would never be able to go a Divination lesson without Professor Trelawney prophesising his death, he thought that he would never be able to completely fool Hermione. Thankfully, Harry noticed that his Potions book wasn’t in his bag, and told his friends to go ahead while he went to retrieve it. He let out a sigh of relief as he approached the Potions lab, glad that Hermione and Ron didn’t insist to go
with him. He was about to enter the classroom when surprisingly, he heard his name.

“Mr. Duskgem, why do you think I would be concerned about Potter and what teachers make him do during detention?” Snape’s icy voice reached his ears.

“Because Professor Umbridge made him use a Blood Quill.” Joseph said. “There must be some rule against punishments that cause harm to the students.”

“It is within a teacher’s discretion to use whatever means they see fit to discipline students.” Snape replied. “If there was such a rule, then you should discuss this with Professor McGonagall, since she is the Head of Gryffindor.”

Harry could hear footsteps getting louder and he began to panic. Whether it was Snape or Joseph, he didn’t want to get caught eavesdropping. Unfortunately, the corridor had nothing to hide him. As the door opened, Harry crouched behind one of the stone braziers. He was sure he was going to get caught, but the Slytherin walked past him, making Harry a little thankful for being short for his age. As he slowly stood, he wondered why in Merlin’s name Joseph had told Snape. He then wondered how the taller raven knew about the Blood Quill when Harry never told him about it. He thought that maybe Joseph had been made to use it before, and that idea made a shudder travel down his spine. Remembering that he still had class, he approached the Potions lab and knocked on the door.

“What is it, Potter?” Snape asked with a sneer.

“I’m sorry to bother you sir, but I’ve forgotten my book.” Harry quickly replied.

The potions master stared at him for a while before shutting the door, and opening after a minute.

“Now be gone.” Snape bit out as he shoved the book into Harry’s hands and slammed the door shut.

Yes, definitely will never be happy to see Snape again. Harry thought as he headed to Divination.
Hogsmeade trip.” Hermione whispered as the three had their dinner.

“How do we know that word won’t get to someone who’ll go straight to Umbitch?” Ron asked.

“I only gave word to tell people we can trust, Ronald.” Hermione said.

Harry nodded and made sounds of agreement while his two friends talked and bickered about the plan, but his focus was mainly on a specific Slytherin, who was seated beside Malfoy, reading a book while he ate and paid no mind to his friends’ conversation.

All day, Harry had been obsessing as to why Joseph brought up the Blood Quill to Snape. He even wondered why Joseph cared about it himself. He was afraid the Slytherin had told McGonagall, but the Head of Gryffindor hadn’t called him to discuss something, nor has she transfigured Umbridge into a ball of yarn that Mrs. Norris would love to get her claws on.

‘…right, Harry? Harry!’” Hermione’s voice pierced his musings and he finally dragged his eyes back to his friends’ faces.

‘’Yeah sure… uhm, what exactly?’’ Harry replied in a daze, making Ron snort unattractively, his mouth full of mashed potatoes, and Hermione pursed her lips, looking exasperated.

“I said that The Three Broomsticks would probably be too obvious place for the meeting and that it would have too many people who recognise us there., wouldn’t it? And focus Harry, the Hogsmeade trip is next weekend already.’’

‘’Right, sorry ‘Mione. And yes, I think The Three Broomsticks will be too crowded. The Shrieking Shack, maybe?’’ Harry suggested while keeping his eyes on Joseph as Malfoy leaned closer to the raven to say something.

It wasn’t that Harry wasn’t interested in this conversation, but his head was full of zigzagging thoughts already and all Harry wanted to do now was to faceplant straight into his soft, warm bed in the dormitory.

‘’Ugh, no offence mate but I’m not going anywhere near that place again. And I doubt others would want to either.” Ron shuddered and Harry belatedly remembered their third year fiasco in that dilapidated house. ‘’But I remember Fred once telling me about some other pub, a little less public. What was it again…Hag’s Horn? Or Hog’s Bed? Something like that I think.’’
“You mean Hog’s Head.” Hermione said with an eye roll. “I don’t know. Isn’t it a bit shady there? Although it’s far away from the main street, so that’s a plus. And I’m sure none of the teachers would set foot in there.”

Harry opened his mouth to add his two sickles but then the sound of benches being pushed back drowned their conversation.

“We’ll continue this later.” Hermione muttered to him as they followed Ron out of the Great Hall.

They were just about to reach the Grand Staircase when Harry felt a tug on his ankle and had his face on the Entrance Hall’s stone floor. Laughter echoed all around him while he hastily picked himself up. Harry didn’t think he could feel any worse, but Malfoy and his friends appearing reminded him that life was never on his side.

“Honestly Potter, it’s a wonder how you manage to survive the Triwizard tournament, given how uncoordinated you are.” Malfoy taunted. “Why don’t you go look and have Diggory kiss your wounds better? Oh wait…”

“Shove off, Malfoy.” Harry spat, standing up.

Any other day, he would have been angry enough already, but with all of the hormonal aggravation and confusing thoughts on Joseph and the Blood Quill, Harry wasn’t able to think clearly. He could feel his blood heated at the sound of Malfoy’s taunts, and it took all he had not to hex the smirk off his face from the start. Harry had to remind himself of what Joseph said. All the ways he might avoid being taunted. Harry stood and made to turn away like the better man.

“What, Potter? Did I strike a nerve? I didn’t mean to bring up your poor, Hufflepuff boyfriend. Actually, seeing how worked up you are about it, you’re probably better off with him dead. Can’t imagine how defensive you-

Harry raised his wand to Malfoy’s nose, “Not another word, Malfoy. I’m warning you now.”

Malfoy looked up the length of Harry’s arm into his eyes with a sort of shiver, but tried to stay steely even as everyone’s eyes turned on him. He was egged on by his mates, all jeering at his sides that he could take Potter. Harry looked over the crowd, his arm unwavering, and caught a glimpse of his friends amongst them, looking torn between pulling him back and defending him.
Harry returned sharpness to his form when he saw Malfoy’s mouth twitch in the corner of his eye. He looked at him again, lips curling in a dark taunt. Then, a flash of black hair caught his eye behind Malfoy’s shoulder and Harry’s form relaxed slightly as he made eye contact with Joseph.

Malfoy took the opportunity to fall back and snicker at him, running off and shouting a weak insult backwards before fully disappearing.

Suddeny, all Harry was aware of were the faces in front of him, questioning him. Harry shook his head, not wanting to look into Hermione’s knowing eyes, and stormed off, pushing his way through the gathered crowd to the staircase without ever glancing back.

That day had mostly disappeared in his mind now…just added to the long list of run-ins he’s had in the hallway this year. Again Harry had to remind himself that these were better than if were to have in-class explosions.

After that time, his week had been uneventful leading up to today. It was Hogsmeade weekend, and Harry found himself once again in the library, studying silently alongside Joseph.

The other raven was quiet as he went through his work. Harry wished he knew how to start a conversation with him, but he only had defense homework, and it’s not like he had a hard time copying down passages. Even he couldn’t be that stupid.

Joseph must have noticed Harry’s apparent frustration because he reached out and took the quill from his hand.

“If you keep doing that, you won’t have any quills left,” Joseph said, pointing out where Harry had apparently been chewing.

He felt a blush creep up to his cheeks and reached for the quill back after Joseph fixed it. “Thanks,” he managed before an awkward silence fell upon them.

“Okay, what is it?” Joseph asked, shutting his book and fully turning to Harry, face untelling.
“What’s what?” Harry asked seemingly obliviously…or, at least, it would have been if not for the horrid blush all the way up his neck.

Joseph looked over him with a sigh. “You have been chewing on your quill, not doing any homework, and opening and closing your mouth several times throughout the hour we’ve been here. Obviously, there’s something you want to talk about.”

Harry dropped his head. He obviously wasn’t as subtle as he liked to think.

“I uh…didn’t really know what to say. I just…I guess I just wanted to talk to you. There never seems to be a safe topic, though.” Harry shrugged, closing his book and turning to face Joseph.

The other boy simply raised an eyebrow. When he figured that Harry had nothing else to add, he sat up to look better into his eyes. “Is the scene with Draco still bothering you?”

Harry shifted uncomfortably in his spot. He hadn’t been thinking about that. Actually, that was quite the opposite sort of conversation he was looking to have. He wanted more of ‘how are your grades’, ‘what’s your favorite color’, ‘do you feel weird when we touch or is that just me?’…but life never went the way Harry wished anyway.

“Of course it’s still bothering me.” Harry could hardly hold back a sneer, reminding himself that it was not Joseph that he was mad at.

Joseph nodded his head slow and cast a privacy ward around them both. “What exactly is bothering you about it? Which part sticks out to you the most?”

“Well…” Harry felt his face screw up in thought. What exactly was he mad about? “I guess that Malfoy got away. He got to disrespect Cedric like that and just run off like he won the whole thing.”

Joseph didn’t comment for a moment, gathering up himself to speak. “I’m certain Draco didn’t mean to disrespect Cedric, but merely to push your buttons. He was, actually, surprised by your violent reaction.”

“Cedric was my friend, and he died for me. It was all my fault that he was even there in the first place. I told him to take the cup with me, together. If I had just grabbed it like I was meant to, he
wouldn’t have even been there in the first place. They never would have had the chance to kill him.”

“Harry. You cannot blame yourself for his death.” Joseph reached out and took his hand in concern. Harry felt fire ignite on his arm and Harry looked back at it two or three times just to be sure he wasn’t actually on fire. “Harry? Are you listening to me?” Now Joseph reached to grab his chin, trying to direct Harry to look into his eyes.

Harry shot up from his chair in a sudden burst of energy he didn’t understand. His heart was beating and he could hear it pounding in his ears. He must have been frustrated. That was the only reason his heart rate ever got this fast.

Desperate to keep himself from accidentally arguing with Joseph again, Harry apologized and excused himself from the library. He grabbed his things, avoiding looking at Joseph, and left as fast as he could.

All he could think was: What the heck just happened?

Harry sat at the Hog's Head with Ron and Hermione as they waited for everyone else who was interested in learning defensive magic. Harry was nervous, because he still wasn't convinced that he was the best person to be doing this, but he was excited about it as well. Not to mention he was still pretty worried up over his interaction with Joseph

"I'll go get some butterbeers." Ron said.

"I was actually wondering Harry.” Hermione began. “What finally helped you agree to do this? I know it had nothing to do with talking to me and Ron.”

"I just went somewhere to think. It also helped that I talked to someone who's neutral about me.” Harry admitted and Hermione gave him a questioning look. He then told her about Joseph and how they had become friends.

"Ah yes, he's one of the top students in Potions class." Hermione said. "I'm surprised Malfoy was made prefect over him."
"Yeah, I'm sure he'd be much better to work with." Harry said.

"So, you two are just friends?" Hermione asked with a knowing smile.

"What are you implying?" Harry asked, hoping he wasn't blushing.

"Don't play dumb, Harry. You blushed while you talked about him." Hermione pointed out. "So?"

"I don't know, 'Mione." Harry admitted. He then told Hermione about all the things he’d been feeling when he was with the raven-haired Slytherin, and how confused he was.

"The answer is quite simple Harry; you like him." Hermione said with a smile. “Before you protest, be honest with yourself for a minute, think things through and after, tell me what you think about him.”

After a short silence, Harry’s eyes widened and Hermione smiled."I like him." Harry admitted, but then his face fell. "I like him. I just don't know if he likes me back."

Hermione nodded and let the topic rest. Ron arrived with the butterbeers and soon, the rest of the students arrived. Harry saw several familiar faces, like Neville, Cho, and the Weasley twins. There were some students from older and younger years. They all gathered in a booth and those who couldn't fit anymore into it got some chairs. The bartender brought another round of butterbeers for everyone.

"Um...hi." Hermione began nervously. "I had...the idea that...people who are interested in studying the Defence Against the Dark Arts, and I mean really study, should do something about it, because what that toad Umbridge is useless." There were a couple of agreeing nods. "I think it'd be best if we took matters into our own hands."

"You do want to pass your OWLs, right?" Michael Corner from Ravenclaw asked.

"Of course I do, but I want to learn how to properly defend myself." Hermione answered. "We all need to because...because Lord Voldemort's back."
The reaction was instant; Padma Patil shuddered, Terry Boot gave an involuntary twitch, Cho's friend screamed, and Neville whimpered.

"Where's the proof?!" A blonde Huffepuff asked aggressively.

"Dumbledore believes it." Hermione said.

"You mean Dumbledore believes him." The blonde Huffepuff returned.

"Oi, what's your name?" Ron asked

"Zacharias Smith." The blonde answered. "I think that we have a right to know what makes him say You-Know-Who is back before joining."

Hermione was about to retort, but Harry stopped her. He knew this was coming, that's why he was reluctant to try and teach several people. Hermione should've expected too that majority of these people came to hear what happened in the maze, how he and Cedric got transported to a graveyard, how the Hufflepuff died.

"Dumbledore told you what happened last year. If you didn't believe him then, you won't believe me now." Harry said.

"All he told us was that You-Know-Who killed Cedric and you brought his body back." Smith said. "He didn't go into details-"

"I'm not going to explain in complete detail how Cedric was killed right in front of me!" Harry shot angrily at Smith, but he really intended the message for everyone. "If that's what you're here for, then you might as well fuck off."

Everyone was a little taken aback, but no one left, not even Smith. Hermione was about to continue when a girl from Hufflepuff chimed in.

"Is it true you can conjure a corporeal patronus, Harry?" She asked, and Harry nodded, making all of them talk excitedly.
"A corporeal patronus?" Harry said to himself, and then turned to the girl from Hufflepuff. "You don't happen to know Madam Bones, do you?"

"She's my aunt. I'm Susan." The girl replied. "Your patronus takes the form of a stag, yes?"

"Blimey Harry, I didn’t know you could do that." Lee Jordan said when Harry confirmed it.

"That’s 'cause mum told us not to spread it around." Fred said.

"She said he’s got enough attention, as it is." George finished. "Being who he is and having to compete in the Triwizard tournament last year."

Everyone then excitedly retold the tales of Harry’s heroics, from saving the Sorcerer’s Stone in his first year, to slaying the Basilisk with Gryffindor’s sword in second year, to fending off hundreds of dementors with his patronus in their third year.

"Look, it’s great when you say it like that." Harry said. "But to be honest, I was terrified every single time and I mostly survived because of luck and pure nerve. I also had a lot of help from these guys."

"Yes, but we’re doing this because we want to learn to defend ourselves against Death Eaters, not dragons." Hermione said. "They’ll be using spells and we’ll be using spells."

After several more minutes, they all agreed that they wanted to learn from Harry and set a schedule that would accommodate all the students. Then came the problem of the venue. The library and an unused classroom were suggested, but they seemed like not the best places for secret lessons.

"We’ll inform everyone once we find a place." Hermione said and brought out a piece of parchment. "Everyone should write their names so we know who was here. And I think we should also all agree not to go talking about this stuff. So if you sign, you’re agreeing not to tell Umbridge, any other teacher, or any student who would willingly rat us out."

The twins immediately stepped forward and signed their names, but everyone else seemed reluctant to do so. Some people gave the excuse that Hermione might forget the list somewhere and the brunette reminded them who they were talking about. Ernie then signed his name, and
everyone else did so after, a lot of them reluctantly. Everyone then started leaving in small groups, leaving Harry, Ron, and Hermione.

"So, what spells should we teach?" Ron asked.

"I've actually come up with a short list of essential ones." Harry said.

"Did you have any help with making the list?" Hermione asked with a knowing smile.

"He did." Someone said, making the three Gryffindors jump. The person in the next booth stood and Harry stared wide-eyed at the Slytherin.

"How much did you hear?" He asked nervously.

"Enough, and don't even try Weasley." Joseph said and Harry saw the ginger reaching for his wand.

"Why not? You'll probably go running to the toad or Snape." Ron said.

"If I was going to tell Snape or Umbridge, do you think I would've waited for your little meeting to finish?" Joseph said. "And Hermione is right; no one is learning anything with Umbridge."

"So, will you be joining us?" Hermione asked.

"I will, but I'll not be attending all the meetings since my housemates will get suspicious." Joseph said, taking the quill and signing his name at the bottom. "I assume you've put some hexes on this thing?"

Hermione nodded and the male Gryffindors looked at her with surprise.

"Just to make sure no one can blab and we'll be able to know who exactly did if they do."
Hermione said.

"It's a pity you weren't sorted into Slytherin." Joseph remarked and Ron glared.

"Anyway, Joseph helped me look for the spells he can help with the first aid magic." Harry said.

Ron and Hermione left together and Joseph and Harry left as well, both of them heading towards the castle.

"Don't let the likes of Smith get to you." Joseph said. "He and lot of people think they can handle the truth about something, but they'll just freak out once you tell them."

"I probably shouldn't have told him to fuck off, though." Harry sighed.

"I think you should have." Joseph said. "It showed that you are serious about teaching them and wouldn't stand for any bullshit. If you hadn't done that, he and everyone else would still be badgering you about what happened. You're going to be a great teacher, Harry."

"Thanks." Harry said with a faint blush. "So, I'll see you later?"

"Sure. By the way..." Joseph began.

The taller raven then took Harry's chin, tilting his head up, before softly pressing their lips together. It took a few seconds for Harry to register what was going on, but he eventually kissed back. The kiss was soft, sweet and tender. They stared at each other through half lidded eyes, before the Slytherin smiled.

"If it wasn't clear, I like you too." He said as he straightened himself with a small smile. "See you later."
“So, I’m going to assume your new, happy mood can be attributed to the Slytherin you’ve been staring at during meal times.” Hermione whispered during dinner.

“Well, yeah. Things are great between us.” Harry replied with a small smile.

“You should still be careful though.” Ron muttered.

“Give it a rest, Ron.” Hermione sighed. “If he was just doing this to get information, Umbridge would have given us detention for the entire year, already.”

“Yeah, and he’s as much a blood purist as you or Hermione.” Harry stated.

“Will he be joining our first meeting tonight?” Hermione asked.

“He might.” Harry said. “He probably will since it might look a little suspicious if a Slytherin arrived in the next one, and I don’t want him to receive any grief.”

“Well, we’ll make him feel welcome.” Hermione said.

Harry thanked them and got up when he saw Joseph do so. He let the Slytherin walk ahead until he turned the corridor and found himself face to face with him.

“Evening, stalker.” Joseph said with a smile

“Says the person who spied on me.” Harry returned with his own smile and kissed the taller raven on the cheek.
They then walked to the library and sat at their usual place.

“So, you’re coming to the meeting today, right?” Harry asked.

“I’m not sure how well-received I’ll be there.” Joseph said,

“I know it’ll probably take some time for everyone to trust you, but I promise they will.” Harry encouraged.

“So, what have you got planned for tonight, professor?” Joseph asked with a smirk.

“I was thinking about the Stunning and Disarming spells.” Harry said. “And if we have time, maybe we can do some basic healing spells.”

Joseph nodded and the two of them stayed in the library until it was nearly time for the meeting. They headed to the seventh floor and entered the magical room, which they were referring to as the ‘Room of Requirement.’ Ron and Hermione arrived soon and they set up everything.

“Alright, Ron and I will go out into the hall.” Hermione said. “We’ll wait for everyone while keeping a watch out for Filch. You just get ready, Harry.”

Harry nodded and handed the Marauders’ Map to Hermione, letting out a shaky breath when she left with Ron.

“You alright?” Joseph asked.

“This is really happening.” Harry said. “I’m preparing students to defend themselves because of an impending war.”

“And you should be proud of that.” Joseph said as he hugged Harry. “You’re doing everything you can to make sure these people have a chance at surviving.”
“I just don’t see why we can’t settle our differences without violence.” Harry sighed.

“In an ideal world, that’s how it would be.” Joseph agreed. “But you don’t have to carry this burden alone. You have me, Hermione and Ron to help.”

Harry smiled and shared a short kiss with Joseph before pulling away quickly when they heard the door and a large group of students came in, smiling at Harry before glaring at Joseph.

“First things first.” Hermione said. “When we leave this room and are coming here, try not to come in a large group.”

There were a few sheepish grins and muttered apologies, then Hermione gave the floor to Harry.

“So, what I’m going to be teaching you all tonight are Disarming and Stunning spells.” Harry announced.

“Are you sure you should be talking about that with present company?” Smith asked, obviously referring to Joseph.

“Well, let’s see how long you last when I don’t teach you healing spells.” Joseph returned, shutting Smith up.

“I think we can all agree that we’re here for the same reasons.” Hermione said. “Working together can only be beneficial. If you have any beef with anyone in this room, that’s fine. But we expect you to be proper and put your differences aside when we’re here.”

Once no one else complained, Harry began teaching. Half an hour later, he paired everyone off, with him and Joseph walking around the room helping everyone. They all were doing well and Harry was thinking of having Joseph teach some basic healing spells when there was a loud crash. He turned to see that Neville had knocked Anthony Goldstein into some chairs.

“I’m sorry.” Neville repeated over and over. “I didn’t mean for the spell to be that strong.”

“Well, now seems an opportune moment to move along.” Joseph said. “It would’ve been preferable if no one got hurt, but I think it’s better this way.”
He then helped Anthony onto a chair and asked everyone to gather around.

“I’ll teach you all to use a simple spell for healing minor injuries. In Harry’s case, it’s been used to fix his nose several times.” He said, showing everyone the wand movement. Once he was done, he then focused on Anthony. “Episkey.”

Anthony gave a slight groan, but everyone saw the bruises on his face heal immediately. Everyone was impressed and Joseph then showed them another spell. He cast a full powered Stunning spell on Harry, with the Gryffindor’s consent, and showed them how to revive stunned friends.

“Renerate.” He casted and Harry awoke instantly.

The rest of the hour consisted of everyone trying to disarm, stun, revive, and heal each other. In the end, everyone thanked Harry, even Joseph, before leaving in small groups.

“Good job.” Joseph said.

“Thanks, you weren’t so bad yourself.” Harry returned. “What spells should we teach next?”

“I think the most essential spell would be the Shield charm.” Joseph said. “And I might not come to the next meeting.”

“Why not?” Harry asked.

“Come on Harry, even I don’t stay out this late in the library.” Joseph said. “I just need to be more careful than anyone else. If Draco and the others start suspecting something, they’ll eventually find out.”

Harry was a little reluctant, but nodded in agreement.

“I understand, but I still wish you’d be here, for support if anything.” Harry said.
“You don’t need any. You were great today.” Joseph said.

Harry thanked the Slytherin and they walked to their common rooms together.

Now, it was Saturday night and rather than being in his dorm, screwing around with his mates, Harry was preparing for his date with Joseph.

He had brushed through his hair a dozen times, but nothing had changed. It was still springing out of his head like some angry cat. Harry sighed as he tucked away his comb, checking the time again to see if he could leave yet. He sighed and started pacing as he waited, running through a dozen scenarios in his head before checking the time again. Finally, it was time to go. After slipping on his invisibility cloak and grabbing his map to double check where Joseph was, Harry headed off to the astronomy tower.

It was dark already and the halls were nearly free of prefects. Harry heard his footsteps echo as he walked through the halls, keeping close eyes on the map for Filch. Thankfully, he made it all the way to the tower safely, and slipped off his cloak before climbing the stairs.

The first thing he noticed when he made it to the top were several candles floating around in the air, much lower than the ones in the Great Hall. There was a couch facing out that was just big enough for two. By the time Harry’s eyes landed on Joseph, his stomach was already churning with butterflies.

Then, they suddenly stopped. It seemed like everything did. Harry didn’t breathe as he took his time looking at Joseph, taking in the perfectly straight clothes, the soft bounce in his hair as he breathed, the small smile on his face. Harry barely noticed the treacle tart Joseph held out to show him or the two spoons in his hand; he was too busy looking past the thin slice of glass into his warm, amber eyes.

“Wow,” Harry mentally smacked himself. *Smooth Potter*

Joseph held back a laugh, “Yes, well, I was hoping you’d like it. I’m assuming that’s a yes?”
Harry nodded with a slight flush appearing on his neck. “It’s brilliant.”

“I suppose it would be even more so if got right to it, don’t you think?” Joseph smiled, gesturing to the couch. Harry just nodded and moved with him to sit down on the couch. Joseph handed Harry a spoon and held the treacle tart between them.

On that night, the two shared their plans for the future and joys of the present. They talked about the silliest things, like who was their favourite teacher, to very deep topics, like their opinion of what happens after death. Their bodies drew closer, and they shared soft kisses and light banter, barely remembering to stay awake and head back to their dorms until the early hours of the morning.

It was one of the best days Harry ever had. It fuelled his patronus now. In fact, any thought of the Slytherin was enough to make Harry happy enough to conjure his corporeal patronus. He had really fallen. Weeks flew by with several more stolen nights, silent library dates, and even the occasional snog in the Room of Requirement before and after DA meetings. Now, it was almost winter break.

Still wracked with nightmares, Harry found solace in the nights when he could stay awake with Joseph until he’d be too tired to dream. It was a sort of safe place for him. Umbridge was getting closer to the DA, the Inquisitorial Squad were everywhere, and detentions were becoming a regular occurrence around the castle. Joseph hardly made it to DA meetings anymore, but he tried every chance he could. The students were improving greatly.

“This is from my mother?” Harry asked.

“To my father.” Joseph answered. “Like I said, they were extremely competitive but, once they graduated, they became good friends.

Harry skimmed the pages; there were some letters about just catching up, asking advice, and setting up appointments. One that caught Harry’s eye was when his mother wrote about how she learned she was pregnant, saying how excited she was to become a mother.

“My father was supposed to be the one to deliver you, you know?” Joseph stated. “But with Voldemort’s rise, things got...complicated.”
“Thank you for this.” Harry said and kissed Joseph.

“You’re welcome Harry.” Joseph replied and hugged the shorter teen.

For the next few minutes, Harry read through the journal of compiled letters. He laughed a lot when he read one that described how his father got injured chasing Sirius for bringing up some of his old screw ups during dinner.

“Can’t you come to the meeting?” Harry asked when they were about to leave.

“I’m not making any promises, but I’ll try.” Joseph answered. “At the very least, I’ll come to walk you back to your common room.”

Harry was a little disappointed, but he nodded and gave Joseph a quick kiss on the cheek before heading to the Room of Requirement. For today, Harry just decided that they’d just practice what they had learned so far, and he was impressed with how well everyone was learning; Neville could disarm; Ginny could stun; everyone seemed to finally be comfortable with their wands. Maybe Hermione was right. Maybe all they needed was someone who had actually used the spells in combat to finally push them past their boundaries.

Harry cut the meeting short that day. It was half because he didn’t want to tire everyone on their last day, and half because he knew some people, such as Joseph, would have to leave early to pack and otherwise prepare for the holiday, but he knew the Slytherin had packed his stuff already. With a final farewell to everyone, Harry watched as his students-peers-friends trickled out of the room.

He was first confronted by Ron and Hermione who promised to find him later in the common room. Then, he found himself telling every person happy holidays and reinventions of the same endearment as they left. He dismissed Fred and George as they spouted off another idea for getting back at Umbridge, and made his way further into the room.

That left Harry with none other than Cho Chang. She was staring, forlornly, into the mirror. Harry took a steady in breath, ready to comfort her as he just had Neville. He’d be lying if he said that he hadn’t noticed her staring. He may or may not have been encouraging the attention she gave him—feeding off the idea of being liked by a girl, properly, for once. She was definitely one of the most attractive girls in school, and while Harry didn’t ever really see himself being with a girl, he could appreciate her aesthetically. Now, though, he had to approach her in a more-than-physical setting, and it was churning his stomach.
“Are you alright?” he greeted her, “I heard Umbridge gave you a hard time the other day.”

“Yeah, I’m alright,” she replied in a pathetic tone that let Harry see how much she wasn’t.

“Anyways,” she continued, “it’s worth it.” With that, she looked back up at the mirror to where the picture of Cedric was taped to the glass.

“It’s just...It’s just learning all this,” Cho turned, gesturing to the room, “makes me wonder, whether he’d known-

“Cedric? Cedric knew all this stuff. He was really good,” Harry choked, nearly losing his composure in remembrance, “It’s just...Voldemort was better.”

Cho seemed to take a moment to consider what he said, swallowing and looking back up at Harry, her eyes showing a dismissal of their previous topic. “You’re a really good teacher, Harry.”

Harry couldn’t help but smile at this. He was very insecure about his teaching, so it was nice to hear that more than Joseph, Ron, and Hermione appreciated it. “I’ve never been able to stun anything before.”

There was a soft stretching, scraping sound, as if a vine were being pulled across cement. Cho looked up and Harry’s eyes followed, both settling on the branch of green and white growing overhead. “Mistletoe,” Cho identified softly, her eyes coming to rest on Harry’s.

Harry, anxious and nervous for the implications of it all spurted, “Probably full of nargles now.”

He could see in Cho’s eyes her desire to fulfil the plant’s request. His head was swimming with a million voices. First, mistletoe means you must kiss. Second, Cho is an attractive girl. Third, Joseph. Fourth, She’s a girl. Fifth, Joseph. Sixth, she was just crying about Cedric. Seventh, she’s still staring.

Cho furrowed her brow, “What are nargles?”

Eighth, her lips look soft. “No idea.”
Ninth, she’s leaning in.

Then, her lips are on his. They’re kissing. They’re kissing. They’re kissing.

It was full, rushed, and sloppy. Cho’s tears were wet against his cheeks and his hands didn’t have a place to go. He stopped thinking. It felt wrong, but this was supposed to be right, wasn’t it? Kissing a beautiful girl under the mistletoe should be a dream come true.

Her tongue felt soft and slimy. Her saliva tasted foreign and all too sweet. He had to lean down and he hated the bend of his neck. They didn’t touch. They kept kissing. They were both awkward and stiff, but they didn’t stop. It didn’t feel like an explosion. It didn’t feel like electricity or fire or home. It felt like an experiment went wrong-like kissing a body of water or snow. Cold, wet, and completely out-of-body.

They finally parted, they both split with mutual excuses, and they heard someone clear their throat. They turned to the door and saw Joseph staring. To anyone, he looked indifferent, but Harry had learned how to read the Slytherin and seeing his pursed lips told the Gryffindor everything.

“It’s not what it looked like.” Harry immediately said when Cho left. “I can explain.”

“Fine.” Joseph said, taking a seat and clutching small arrangement of flowers in his hand. “Explain.”

“Cho was just thanking me and there was a mistletoe.” Harry said. “I thought, the kiss wouldn’t mean anything, so why not? It is customary.”

“I’m not mad about the kiss.” Joseph said, “I’m mad about what happened before that.”

“What are you talking about?” Harry asked.

“I was standing there a long time. I saw how she flirted with you, inched closer with every single word.” Joseph pointed out.
Harry shifted his weight, balling his fists and looking up to Joseph’s eyebrows, unable to look him in the eye. “Yeah, so?”

“Actions speak louder than words. You didn’t tell her to back off or that you weren’t interested.” Joseph had set his jaw, his tone growing more heated, but remaining even and low.

“What does it matter?” Harry pleaded, throwing his arms out to his sides, as if to dismiss the event, “I’m with you, not her.”

Joseph rolled his eyes before casting them downward, “Yeah, because I was your only option at the time, right? Now someone better has come along.”

“You’re being unreasonable,” Harry offered more than asserted. His head was swimming right now. This shouldn’t be happening. None of it. He had to make it go away. Things had been going so well between them.

“Am I? If I were you, I wouldn’t have kissed Cho. I would’ve told her I wasn’t interested because you’re the only one I’m interested in,” Joseph rushed, face hot and hidden as he ducked. He let his words sit for a moment before quieting his voice and tone, looking up at Harry openly, “You’re the only one I want to kiss.”

Harry froze for what felt like an eternity. He wanted to tell Joseph that he felt exactly the same, but he had lost all proof of that argument with Cho tonight. He quieted his voice, “I was being… polite.” His voice almost shook, he looked at his feet, not even believing himself.

“Polite. So what, you knocking her up would be considered friendly?” Joseph asked through nearly gritted teeth. He raised a hand to adjust his glasses before sighing. “Nevermind. Have a happy fucking Christmas, Harry.”

Joseph shoved the small bouquet into Harry’s hands, turned away without looking at him, and left the room. Harry wanted to go after Joseph, but he was rooted on the spot. All he could do was stare down at the crumpled flowers.

Tenth, what the hell did he just do?
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Here we see winter break and its end. Hopefully, something will be resolved, but I make no promises.

Chapter 5

Harry was not in a festive mood.

Sure, he was happy to be spending the holidays with his godfather and friends; he was glad to see Mr. Weasley recovering well. Still, he just couldn't shake that horrible feeling of guilt and shame. He had tried sending letters, but all of them were returned unopened. Hedwig didn't look too put off for travelling far for nothing, though; Harry noticed a few crumbs every time she returned.

Harry had no idea how to fix this. He was on his bed, fretting over Joseph yet again, when Hermione knocked, then entered.

She looked him over, then furrowed her brow with a small frown, "Harry, you can't stay in here and mope until we go back to Hogwarts."

"I can try," at her look Harry sighed, "I know, alright? But I screwed up big time, Hermione. I know I did. I knew then that I had, but I still tried to defend it to him. What the hell is wrong with me?"

"Well, we can’t really know for sure what’s wrong, Harry...but, if you asked me, I’d say it's most likely your connection to Voldemort." Hermione said. "Whatever it is that’s letting you see into what’s happening. That gives you the nightmares. I bet that's also why you've been getting angry for no reason at all. It’s definitely not regular teenage hormones...Maybe it's...influenced you."

"That still doesn't excuse what I did. I have a will of my own, don't I?" Harry snapped, running his hands through his hair, only making it stand out worse than usual.

"Give Joseph some space, for now." Hermione advised as she sat beside her friend, laying a hand gently on his shoulder. "Let him cool off for the rest of the holidays, then talk to him when we get back. That way, you can think of what you should really be saying. Make sure that whatever you’re telling him will be for both of your benefits and not just yours"

Harry nodded, leaning against Hermione as she wrapped an arm around him. After a moment of simple comfort, he agreed that her suggestion was the best course of action. Once she had double-checked that he was alright, Hermione dragged him downstairs to help with cleaning up. After lunch, Mrs. Weasley allowed everyone an hour’s rest before resuming with the cleaning. Harry
wandered about the house, attempting to distance himself from everyone. He really needed time to
discuss his own issues with himself.

He found himself slipped into a lounge that was decorated by the Black's family tree, which
covered the majority of the walls, growing in intricate patterns of branches and leaves. The
complicated patterns reminded him of Hermione talking about how some purebloods interbred
throughout history in an attempt to keep their line pure. Of course, his first thought went to Joseph.
How closely was he related to other pureblood families? How was he related to Draco, or Ron?
He then wondered if Joseph had any ancestors up on that wall.

"Looking for something Harry?" Sirius asked from the doorway, a knowing smirk dancing across
his lips.

Harry’s head snapped over to him at the sound, slightly startled, but he soon relaxed at seeing
Sirius. "Just seeing which families you’re related to." Harry answered.

"Looking for any in particular?" Sirius asked, to which Harry replied, a slight blush on his cheeks.
"The Duskgems? No, the Blacks haven’t married with any of them—at least that’s recorded.
Surprising really...if my brother hadn't gone and gotten himself killed, mother would've probably
offered him to Anastasia on a silver platter."

"Anastasia?" Harry asked, head tilted at the foreign name, "Joseph has an aunt?"

"So that's the mystery man," Sirius said and smirked when Harry blushed. "Don't try to hide it,
Harry. You behave just like your father did with Lily. It's like the Harry-Charlus fight all over
again."

"Alright, so I like Joseph." Harry admitted and rolled his eyes when Sirius's smirk grew. "So what
happened to his aunt?"

"Well, I assume you asked what Joseph's parents did during the war?" Sirius asked and Harry
nodded. "Well, then you know they were double-agents, but, what you don’t know is that, against
her family's wishes, Anastasia joined the Order."

Harry felt a lump in his throat, feeling that he knew where this was going, but he asked Sirius to
continue.

"Dumbledore then sent her to a town with a muggle-born child to find and bring them to a safe
house." Sirius said, body tensing up. "The Death Eaters found her. Killed the family and brought
Anastasia to Voldemort, who asked Stephen to prove his family's loyalty to him by killing his
treachinous sister."

"Did...did he do it?" Harry asked nervously and Sirius nodded grimly.

"He loved his sister, but he had a harsh choice to make; kill his sister, or spare his sister and both
of them will be killed, and his parents and pregnant wife will be hunted down." Sirius sighed.

"That's terrible" Harry said.

"War forces people to do things they normally wouldn't." Sirius said sadly. "But Voldemort lost,
and Stephen's son and you can be happy together."
"Well...we're not together...at the moment." Harry said and then told Sirius what happened. Shoulder slumped and eyes cast away, Harry sighed, "He hates me, Sirius."

"He doesn't hate you, Harry." Sirius said as he hugged his godson. "He's angry with you, that's understandable, but he doesn't hate you. If he did, he would've replied to your letters and told you to fuck off." Harry smiled small at the notion, and Sirius chuckled. "Give him time and some space. When you see each other again, explain what happened, and tell him the three words everyone wants to hear from their partners after an argument: I was wrong."

"Thanks, Sirius." Harry said as he hugged his godfather.

"So…" he shifted topics smoothly, “What are you getting him for Christmas?” Sirius asked.

"Well, I was thinking some crystal phials, since he's into Potions." Harry said.

"Well, he probably has several sets of those already." Sirius said. "Why not ask Hermione for some help?"

Before Harry could object, the door opened, and Hermione walked in.

"Were you eavesdropping?" Harry asked, a little uneasy about it.

"Just making sure you wouldn't return to your room depressed again." Hermione answered matter-of-factly, "Why don't you buy Joseph some comics?"

Harry sighed, rubbing behind his neck, "Most likely, he has any comic I could possibly think off."

"Isn't there a comic style that comes from Japan? Think he'd have that?" Sirius asked.

"Oh that's right!" Hermione pointed to Harry, "Harry, why don't you buy him a few manga books?"

"Do you think he'll like them?" Harry asked.

"It'll depend on what the story is, I'm thinking." Hermione considered. Harry shrugged. It made sense, at least.

"Now, how do I pick them out? And where do I actually buy them?" Harry asked. "It's not like I can go out and shop like any other person with people out for my blood."

"Why not?" Sirius asked and the two students looked dumbfounded at him. "Voldemort's expecting us to hide you Harry. He won't be looking for you in a comic book store."

"Hiding in plain sight. It just might work Harry." Hermione admitted after a minute of calculating in her head.

"I doubt that Mrs. Weasley will let us leave." Harry pointed out.

"Tonks is the only other Order member here and she'll let us slip out." Sirius smirked. "And Molly is too pre-occupied with Arthur. I'll join you two as Padfoot for security."

So Harry, Sirius, and Hermione left, promising to bring Tonks something sweet, and headed for the nearest shopping centre. They dropped by the hobby store and Harry inquired about possible mangas that Joseph might like while Hermione stayed outside with Sirius. After a few minutes, Harry decided on buying Joseph the first five issues of a manga about an orchestra.
After the comic shop, he went with Hermione to buy gifts for her parents. She bought a seashell necklace for her mother and a wooden pipe for her father. They stopped by a stall and bought four pretzels, one of them covered in brown sugar, before heading back to Grimmauld Place. Harry was confident that his gift would get Joseph to start talking to him again. Sadly, his good mood didn’t last long since once they were through the door, they were greeted by a very angry Molly Weasley.

“I held her off for as long as I could.” Tonks said before snatching her pretzel and fleeing to the kitchen.

“Now Molly, let us explain.” Sirius began, but shut his mouth when Molly glared at him directly.

“Five days!” She yelled. “That’s how long Arthur had to stay at St. Mungo’s after the attack, and he had excellent healers treating him! How foolish do any of you have to be to risk venturing out into the open like that?!?” She then focused on Sirius. “I know you must be restless by now Sirius, but you’ve deliberately put all of your lives at risk!”

“Mrs. Weasley, it isn’t like that/ You see-” Hermione tried to protest, but Mrs. Weasley’s gaze made her feel the same kind of dread when she McGonagall was going to give her a failing mark.

“I expected better from you Hermione,” Molly stated pointedly. “I thought you would know Harry’s safety is a top priority, as well as yours. Don’t you remember what those Death Eaters did to that muggle family during the World Cup? They’re going to do a whole lot worse now that You-Know-Who’s back. What would your parents have thought once they heard that we found you dead in a gutter somewhere?” Hermione bowed her head in shame, and Molly turned to Harry, who was scared to death of what she might say. But she didn’t say anything; she just sighed, shook her head disapprovingly, and returned to the kitchen. She probably didn’t want to yell at Harry, aka the reason Arthur was still alive. But if he was being honest, Harry would’ve preferred it if Molly had yelled at him. Her silence simply meant that her frustrations with him today would come up again some time in the future.

The three of them helped out more around the house that day as an apology for making Molly worry. Molly eventually returned to her cheerful self, but told Sirius that they were going to talk later. All Harry and Hermione could do was give him sympathetic looks.

Right before dinner, Harry wrapped Joseph’s gift to the best of his ability, and sent Hedwig to deliver it. Dinner was a happy time, as it always was when Molly cooked. Everyone seemed to relax during dinner, and everyone left the table satisfied. Harry returned to his room to see that Hedwig returned with a package and a letter. At first, he feared that Joseph sent his gift back, but then noticed that the package on his bed was much larger than the one he sent, and that the letter attached to it was addressed to him. He stared at his name for a few minutes, which was written in the same elegant scrawl as several notes in his Potions book, before opening it.

_Harry,_

_Thank you for the gift. It was very thoughtful and I’ve been meaning to start reading manga, but didn’t know where to start. I hope you love your gift as much as I loved mine. As for what happened before the holiday break, I’m willing to talk about it, but not until we return to Hogwarts. I don’t think either of us wants to worry our friends and families by being depressed during Christmas. Anyway, I hope you enjoy the rest of your holidays and I’ll see you when we get back._
Harry reread the letter a few more times before sighing with relief and smiling. He gave Hedwig a treat and opened the large package. Inside was a box; inside the box were several comics that Harry had mentioned weeks ago that he wanted. He almost lost it when he saw the first ever issue of Batman.

*It must’ve taken weeks to find this and cost God knows what.* Harry thought. Hermione and Ron came in a few minutes later and while the brunette was in awe of the package’s contents, Ron looked a little confused, so Harry and Hermione spent most of the night teaching Ron about comic books.

The next day, Harry found himself completely unable to focus on anything that he should be doing. He should be enjoying the time with his surrogate family. He should be focused on having fun with Sirius. Instead, he was thinking about Joseph.

He was sitting on his bed, letters piled up in a heap. He felt like he was swimming through them. Almost every single one was titled Joseph and almost every single one was unopened. Just as Harry was worrying his lip, wondering whether there was a spell for resealing the letters, he had an idea to distract himself.

He gathered up the letters between himself and Joseph and placed them all into a box, then slid it under his bed. Then, he headed over to his trunk and brought out a leather-bound book, the one Joseph had given to him, which was filled with letters between his mother and Joseph’s father. He brought it back to his bed, and then he started to read through it yet again, smiling almost nostalgically.

Suddenly, he felt a presence behind him, and turned when a hand fell on his shoulder.

“Sirius?” he asked, letting out a breath he didn’t know he was holding.

Sirius only chuckled, “Hey, mind if I join ya?” At Harry’s head shake, he sat, “What have you got there?”

“Letters. Joseph gave them to me… They’re between mum and his dad. Did you know they were friends?”

Sirius cracked a wide grin, “Oh her and step-on me? Definitely. Your mother was friends with just about anyone who had a decent brain.”
Harry couldn’t help but chuckle at the nickname. “That was the best you could come up with? Step-on me?”

“What? I thought it was brilliant. Steph-en, step-on. It works,” Sirius held his hands out in a comedic gesture and Harry chuckled again.

“Anyways…” Harry grinned, changing topics, “I was just reading them over. Sort of puts me in a better mood, you know?”

Sirius smiled sadly, “I suppose it helps you, doesn’t it? They make you feel closer to her somehow?”

Harry just stared at the letters before him and nodded, the difference in his demeanor improved greatly since he read through the letters several minutes ago. Sirius set a hand on his shoulder and pulled Harry towards him for a hug.

“Come on. How’s about we go through those letters and I can tell you all the bits they left out, ay?” Sirius offered

Harry skimmed through the pages, stopping at one, and handed the book to his godfather, who read it aloud.

“Dear Stephen,

I’m sorry to bother you on a weekday, but do you, perhaps, know the cure for Mumblemumps? I’ve been told the patient absolutely cannot come out of his room for risk of ruining his chances with anyone who dares see him.

As always, I hope you're doing well. How has your garden been fairing?

Your friend, Lily”

“Oh yeah!” Sirius grinned, chuckling, “I remember that one. That was all me. I had caught ‘em from who-knows-where and I just couldn’t bear to step outside. Every student in a ten-mile-radius would’ve run for the hills. Luckily, good ol’ Step-on-me came and saved the day.”
Harry snickered, “All over you having some chipmunk cheeks?”

“It’s more than that you twerp. I was miserable and hideous. It was absolutely terrifying,” Sirius swore, voice dramatic. Harry just rolled his eyes as they continued through the letters.

At some point, Harry had fallen asleep slumped over the paper, head on Sirius’s thigh. This, of course, he only knew because he woke in that very position, his godfather asleep against the wall. He groaned and stretched, getting up and looking over the scene. Oddly enough, it was light out. Harry realized, he had just slept through the whole night.

Maybe that’s what it feels like to have family. Having a full night’s rest after months of tossing and turning with nightmares. He was finally safe.

It was almost painful when the holidays ended. As Harry stepped onto the platform, he felt his chest growing tight. Not only was he upset about having to leave Sirius and the Weasleys, but he was extremely nervous about seeing Joseph. They were going to have that serious talk at some point, but when? Would Joseph say “hi” to him here, if he saw him? Would he look for him on the train? Ask to sneak away to a private compartment to talk? Harry’s head was spinning with possibilities.

He soon found himself flanked on both sides by Ron and Hermione. The three boarded the train, Harry searching the whole time for another raven with rectangular glasses and amber eyes.

As he sat amongst his friends in their compartment, Harry found himself avoiding conversation, even with the trolley lady as she passed by. When Harry heard Cho’s soft voice just outside the compartment, he looked out and nearly cringed at seeing her.

It wasn’t that she was hard to look at, her skin was soft, her hair was shiny, her lips as pink and plump as they ever were. However beautiful she was, Harry couldn’t look at her without cringing. Here she was, smiling at him before walking past his compartment yet again, and all he could think of was that horrid kiss. Harry sunk back in his seat and let himself move into a mindset full of regret and disgust.

He was just falling into his little pity-party when there was a knock at the compartment door. He looked up, heart racing as he braced to see Joseph. To his disappointment, it was just Hermione and Ron returning from their prefect meeting.

“Harry, you have got to stop sulking,” Hermione said, immediately sitting across from him and
leaving Ron to take the seat beside Neville.

Green eyes flashed to brown before darting back to his own hands. Harry pulled his legs up onto the seat, leaning his back to the wall of the compartment, and he curled in on himself. “How am I gonna fix this, Hermione? It just all feels so impossible.”

“Harry, we’ve been over this. Give him space. Give him time. He’ll come to you when he’s ready to talk.” Hermione tried to reach out to place a hand on his knee, but rethought it and pulled her hand away at the last second, sighing soft.

Harry bit his lip and lowered his head, “What will I even say then? I can’t very well blame it all on some voice in my head or some internalized homophobia shit. Joseph’s not an idiot. Even the truth isn’t going to convince him that I deserve a chance with him.”

Ron pulled a sad smile, “Look, mate. None of us can really tell what Joseph will say or do, but, trust me, he cares about you. I don’t think he’ll just give up.”

“He wouldn’t be giving up. He’d be making a good decision,” Harry stated, and Hermione looked at him in shock., “Being with me is only going to hurt him. Look at all the shit I go through...the pain I cause. I have so many enemies that sooner or later one of them is going to be successful. I don’t want him caught in crossfire anyways. Maybe...Maybe this is all for the best.”

“Harry, you can’t really mean that?” Hermione asked in disbelief. “You don’t cause the...pain. It’s everyone else. You’re good, Harry.”

He rolled his eyes at her, “That hardly makes a difference, Hermione. Besides, I’m obviously not as good as everyone would like to believe. I have darkness inside of me, and this wasn’t the first time I chose to act on it. I doubt it will be the last. Joseph is too important to me...I can’t hurt him.”

“Mate, don’t you think he’s hurting worse without you?” Ron spoke up, trying to keep his words steady.

Harry simply shrunk more into himself, “Which will be better for him in the long run? Honestly...should I even be trying to get him back if, in the end, he’ll just be worse off for it? If I really care for him... I should let him go. I shouldn’t be selfish.”

“I don’t think that’s your decision to make, Harry,” Hermione said softly. She placed a hand his
knee and held his gaze, “Joseph is smart enough to understand the consequences of being with you. When you speak to him, be sincere. Make sure he knows how much you care. Then, let him decide whether he wants to risk being with you. You know you want to be with him, so don’t jeopardize your own happiness. You being selfish would be denying him the choice whether or not to stay with you.”

Harry sighed and nodded, then felt another hand rest on his foot. He looked over his knees at Luna, who gave a smile and handed him a white flower with a total of six petals and a slender stem.

“The Zephyranthes, better known as the Rainflower or the Magic Lily. Give it to him when you speak,” Luna told him softly, then she tucked back into her corner, reading her magazine.

Harry furrowed his brows for a moment, studying the small flower. “Uh, thanks, Luna,” Harry muttered, still confused.

“Don’t worry,” she said from behind the magazine, “Joseph will know what it means.”

Harry nodded and resigned himself to memorizing the variations of color and texture on the flower as the train went along, entirely removed from the conversation around him. Maybe, maybe this flower would make it all better.

- 

The feast was underway and Harry couldn’t keep himself from looking over to the Slytherin table every so often, watching as Joseph ate and politely made conversation with his housemates. Hermione tugged on his sleeve and said he should try to talk to other people. So Harry conversed with his friends, discussing what they had done over the break, before excusing himself when he saw a specific Slytherin stand and leave. Harry followed him from a distance until they reached their usual spot in the library.

“Hey.” Harry greeted as he sat next to Joseph.

“Hey.” Joseph greeted back. “How are you?”

“I’m well.” Harry answered, nervously picking at his robe.

An awkward silence fell between then. Harry wanted to say so many things, but couldn’t find the words. Harry felt the flower Luna gave him in his pocket. Taking in a deep breath, he took it out, and offered the Zephyranthes to the taller raven. Joseph took it, and stared at it. Harry was about to leave, when he felt Joseph take his hand. The Slytherin then pulled him onto his lap, and enveloped Harry in a tight hug.
“I’m so sorry,” Harry said as he buried his face in the crook of the Slytherin’s neck.

“I forgive you.” Joseph shushed the Gryffindor while rubbing the shorter teen’s back.

They stayed like that for a few minutes, enjoying the warmth coming from each other’s embrace. They pulled away, and Harry sat on the chair next to Joseph. He opened his mouth to apologise more, but Joseph stopped him.

“You don’t need to apologise anymore.” He said, holding up the flower. “This told me all I needed to hear.”

“That’s great, but to be honest, I don’t know what it means.” Harry admitted. “Luna just told me to give it to you.”

“Really?” Joseph asked with a chuckle, a sound Harry sorely missed. “Well, the Zephyranthes can mean three things, but I think the second applies to the situation; ‘I must atone for my sins.’”

“Well, I really feel like I should.” Harry said.

Joseph pulled Harry back into the hug for a minute or more, then they separated to sit together, already feeling a bit more like themselves. Harry opened his mouth to say more, but Joseph stopped him.

“We should really talk about what happened.” Harry said.

“And we will.” Joseph replied. “But I just want a quiet evening with you again. Please?”

Harry smiled and nodded, agreeing to put their serious conversation on hold for the time being.

“Have you finished your potions essay?” Joseph asked.

“You should know that I haven’t.” Harry said.

“Good.” Joseph said with a smile, making Harry give him a confused look. “I’ve missed tutoring you.”

They spent the next couple of minutes discussing the essay, talking about their holidays until Madame Pince kicked them out, and Joseph then walked Harry to the Gryffindor common room. The two shared a short, but amazing, kiss before parting ways for the night, and for the first time in weeks, Harry didn’t have any nightmares.
Now Harry must face the dreaded conversation with Joseph. This will certainly mark a new state in their relationship. However, it is unclear whether that mark shall be good or bad.

Maybe it was for the best that Harry and Joseph waited until today to talk. Maybe it wasn’t. Whatever the case, here he was, sitting awkwardly with Joseph in the Room of Requirement, which they had decided was the best place for neutral and private grounds.

The room had provided them two couches facing each other and very soft, yet unromantic lighting. Harry had immediately kicked off his shoes and pulled his feet up under him, sitting criss-crossed. Joseph, of course, rolled his eyes and perched on the couch parallel, one foot carefully laced over the other.

“Well,” Harry started, clearing his throat, “Where do you wanna start?”

“I suppose the best would be to give me an account of the proceedings between yourself and Cho before the day of the incident. For example, were there any,” he cleared his throat politely, “previous indulgences?”

Harry shook his head, “Not at all, though I should admit to leading her on. I had a feeling she might be flirting, but...I suppose I enjoyed the attention.”

“Right, of course. Now, on the day of the incident?” Joseph was attempting to keep a clear face, but his voice was quieter than usual, as though on the verge of breaking.

Harry swallowed, looking down at his hands, “Everyone had left. Cho was looking at Cedric’s photo in the mirror. She was upset, obviously, and I was trying to - I don’t know - encourage her, maybe? Or at least...give her some truth to hang on to. We were in this...strange atmosphere, talking about Cedric and death and war, when a sprout of mistletoe grew overhead....I suppose you know the rest.”

“So...the kiss was obligation?”

“Yes. But...also, no. I want to be totally honest with you because I really fucked things up. I..I knew it was wrong. I knew before I kissed her it was wrong, but...there was this voice...telling me that I should want it. That I was meant to want pretty girls to kiss me. It wasn’t even a good kiss. It was wet and full of tears or sweat...And it just...it wasn’t you.”

Joseph looked down, taking a few minutes to process. When he finally looked up, his eyes were slightly more swollen than usually, but he was otherwise unchanged.
“Did this experience...solve something for you?” Joseph asked carefully.

Harry was struck dumb. Of course it had, but...it was a weird feeling.

“I, I guess so. I mean, I didn’t even realize how...pressured I was? Until that happened. I guess I was sort of afraid of being different or unusual. I’m already such an unordinary person, I don’t want to stick out anymore. I didn’t want to be a boy who likes a boy in my rival house who just so happens to be my rival’s best friend. It’s too...abnormal. I feel like I’m in some angsty drama, and I really hate that, but...I really love you more.”

Joseph let him smile slightly at that, “I love you, too, Harry. I’m not...entirely sure that I trust you, yet, but I do love you. I...I think this will be helpful for me to move on.”

Harry looked at him, hopeful, “Do you think it would be alright for me to sit with you now?”

His only answer was a smile twitch of Joseph’s lips, and his movement to one side of the couch. The green-eyed boy jumped up to move to his boyfriend’s side before he could change his mind.

“I’ve missed you. I know I’ve already said that, but I don’t think I can ever mean it enough,” Harry smiled small, peeking up at Joseph from behind his lashes.

When Joseph wrapped an arm around his shoulders to pull him closer, he knew the sentiment was returned.

“…” Ron started awkwardly, rubbing the back of his neck, “Preparing for uh your date?”

Harry just nodded in the mirror, untying his tie yet again.

“You know, I think they have spells for that,” Ron offered from his spot on the bed, rolling on his stomach to get a better view of Harry, who only grunted in response.

“Fine, if you’re gonna be like that then. Thought it might help,” Ron murmured with a spitting point to every other word or so, propping his head onto his hands.

Harry rolled his eyes in the mirror, “Really? And do you know any of those spells?”

Ron grumbled a no and Harry went back to his feeble attempt at keeping the tie symmetric. He sighed, knowing his time was running out. He settled on a nearly-correct attempt and grabbed his wand, stashing it away before turning from Ron’s judging eyes to the door and leaving.

He was talking to himself as he walked, coaching himself on what to and what not to do. Down the stairs, then out the door, he repeated phrases in a mantra, preparing to see Joseph. He didn’t want to screw this up.

Joseph had agreed to very carefully resume their relationship. It wasn’t quite starting over, but it wasn’t picking up where they left off, either. It was a new territory for the both of them, and it made Harry’s stomach flip-flop.

He was going to be accompanying Joseph on a trip to Hogsmeade, where Harry was meaning to find his present to Ron. Harry knew that it was early to be finding a present...he hadn’t even been shopping for Valentine’s yet, but...it was his best idea for a date. As he walked out of the common room, he breathed out and began walking towards the Great Hall, as he was meant to meet Joseph
just outside the castle doors.

He was walking along when he nearly ran into his worst nightmare - Draco Malfoy. The blond was just as ever: scowl on his face, nose turned up, completely unaware of those around him. Harry stuttered to a stop and tried to escape the blond’s pathway as soon as possible. Just as he was ducking around him, Malfoy cleared his throat.

“Potter. Stop there,” he commanded.

Harry breathed and kept walking, “Not a chance Mal-”

His sentence was stopped as two solid hands landed hard on his shoulders. He was shoved backward by their sheer weight, stumbling slightly as he was moved.

“You will listen,” ordered Malfoy sharply, “You are lucky to have the opportunity to exist in the same time period as Joseph. He has taken some...liking...to you, which I must accept. I will not, however, accept you causing him trouble in any way. If I come to learn that you have hurt him physically, emotionally, or otherwise… My father will be hearing about it. And so will his father. And so will the fathers of any contact I have. Fear this and heed my warning, Potter. I have no reason to pity you.”

Harry nodded, “I'm not going to hurt him. I...I couldn’t bear it.”

Malfoy narrowed his eyes, then continued walking without another word, snapping his fingers so his goons would follow after him. Harry breathed out slowly and shook his head, soon continuing on his path to meet Joseph.

He made it through the castle doors without another incident, and found the other raven waiting patiently, sitting on the short wall between pillars with his nose in a book. Harry smiled fondly at him and walked over to him.

“Joseph,” he breathed in greeting, “You look stunning.”

He really did. Dressed in a pressed black button-up and matching slacks, Joseph was classy and formal and gorgeous all in one. He had a simple grey tie on, and Harry felt very underdressed, despite wearing a nearly equal outfit in lighter colors.

Joseph let his face lighten, his mouth nearly curving into a smile as he shrunk his book, standing and tucking it into his pocket.

“I could say the same for you,” he remarked softly, offering his hand to the shorter boy.

Harry felt his cheeks grow warm and he took the other’s hand in his. Joseph began walking them towards the pathway, choosing to walk to Hogsmeade rather than ride in one of the carriages. Harry kept close to his side, not wanting to have a millimeter of space between them.

Their walk into Hogsmeade was a quiet one, but it made Harry’s heart flutter still. Here he was, back at the side of the one person in the world that he knew for certain he wanted to be with, and he couldn’t be happier.

They took only about twenty minutes to walk into Hogsmeade, then decided to go to Madame Puddifoot’s for some hot tea first. They sat together in one of the back booths, tucked away from
the rest of the people. They were still silent, and Harry could feel an awkward air begin to seep into their atmosphere.

“So..” he tried, “How was your Christmas? Did you get everything you wanted?”

Joseph nodded, “It was quite nice, actually. Despite some...distractions in my own mind, it was really quite enjoyable. I received several new suits and a new tuxedo. New dress shoes and new shoes for sport. I also received a new set of vials made of pure diamond.”

“Wow…” Harry breathed. His present definitely did not meet the standard that Joseph was used to.

“Don’t feel bad, Harry. We hadn’t been dating long. It wouldn’t have been normal for you to spend so much on a present for me. And now...well, we’ll begin logging our time again, I suppose. Anyways, how was your Christmas?” Joseph turned his eyes on Harry, having successfully moved the subject off of himself for the moment.

“Well,” Harry sighed, “Alright, to a point. I got to see the people I care about - godfather included. I uhm wasn’t in a particularly good frame of mind, however, so I didn’t appreciate my time there to its full value.”

Joseph nodded in understanding and took a slow sip of his tea. Harry did the same, and the silence fell over their table again. Harry swallowed hard.

“Will this ever stop?” he asked Joseph desperately.

Joseph wanted to ask what Harry was talking about, but he knew perfectly well what it was.

“I don’t know, Harry. Eventually, I suppose, but for now...we may have to deal with hard answers and long silences. That’s the reality that we have to deal with because of decisions you made. One day, hopefully, we will be passed this, but not now,” Joseph explained without hesitation.

Harry nodded in understanding, and went back to is tea. He decided to stop thinking about the moments that were being missed in the silence, and think of those being made when it was gone. Sure, t was awkward and strange, but he wasn’t really expecting anything else. It was more than a blessing to have a moment with Joseph, so a whole afternoon was not something he’d give up soon.

Their day became somewhat easier once their tea was gone and they were walking from shop to shop. Joseph dropped hints about Valentine’s day, as did Harry, and Joseph helped Harry find a perfect gift for Ron. In a shop just a lane away from the main street in Hogsmeade, Joseph tracked down a signed photograph of a long-dead Chudley Cannon’s player, who Ron had idolized his entire life. Harry bought it in a moment’s breath, and, before he knew it, they were chatting comfortably on their walk home.

Joseph had originally planned to leave Harry outside the castle, but became so involved in their discussion behind the origin of Quidditch and the poor birds that suffered at its start, that he ended up walking Harry all the way up to the Gryffindor entrance. The conversation teetered off at a breath of the last known death of said bird, and Harry turned his back to the entrance.

“I suppose this is the end of our date for tonight,” said Harry softly, a hint of dejectedness in his voice.

Joseph smirked slightly and leaned in to press his lips to Harry’s, almost smiling as he pulled away.
“Don’t worry, Harry. We’ll have many more in the future, I’m sure,” he confirmed, eyes meeting those of green confidently. “I’ll miss you until then.”

Harry allowed himself a bright smile, “I won’t stop thinking about you until then.”

Joseph nodded, truly believing this before kissing Harry once more in parting, pulling away and turning to the stairs. As he made his first step down, he heard Harry’s voice call after him.

“I love you, you know,” he near-shouted.

Joseph gave a soft smile, turning back to his boyfriend, “Of course I do. I know everything.”

Harry chuckled, shoulders going lax as he shrugged, waving to the taller raven.

Joseph took a few more steps, then turned back to see Harry was still there.

“I love you, too, you know,” he said, a blush creeping up his neck at the publicity of it all.

“I know,” Harry grinned, laughing slightly as he turned, finally disappearing through the portrait hole.
Chapter 7

Harry had really gotten into the rhythm of teaching. Now that all was well - or, at least, would soon be well - with Joseph, there was nothing left to drag him down. He was now teaching the most challenging lesson yet...the patronus charm.

“Make it a powerful memory. The happiest you can remember. Allow it to fill you up,” Harry instructed passionately as he made his way through the room.

He noticed several students already working at it. At seeing a wisp from his wand, Harry encouraged, “Keep trying Seamus.”

His heart was beating fast with exhilaration as he surveyed his peers, his students, his friends at action. Grinning, he picked one from the bunch.

“George,” he chose as he walked in front of the much taller boy, “Your turn now.”

“Expecto patronum!” chanted George forcefully.

Harry grinned as light burst from his wand and he continued onto the rest, “A full-bodied patronus is the most difficult to produce, but shield forms can also be equally useful against a variety of opponents.”

Just then, Ginny repeated the spell and out from her wand came a horse, which whinnied at finding its form.

“Fantastic, Ginny!” Harry exclaimed, soon sobering a bit, “Just remember, your patronus can only protect you for as long as you stay focused, so focus. Luna,” he moved on with a nod at the girl.

He observed Hermione nursing the light to her otter and checked in with Neville and Susan as the otter circled her head. “Think of the happiest thing you can,” Harry urged to Neville, whose wand
would only produce a string of light.

“I-I’m trying,” Neville stuttered, clearly desperate to please his teacher.

Harry smiled softly, “I know. It’s good.”

He turned from Neville then, glad to see him resuming practice. Once out of eyesight, Neville was soon knocked over by Ron’s pup, which ran to play with Hermione’s otter in the air above them. Luna, too, had conquered the spell, neatly producing a rabbit that soon bounded away.

Harry looked around, proud of all the progress his students had been making. He was sorry that Joseph wasn’t there to share in the energy, but the raven-haired boy had visited one-too-many times already, and people were beginning to get suspicious.

Just as these thoughts were crossing his mind, Harry noticed the room shake. He looked around to see who had run into what when he noticed everyone go silent. They were looking around at each other in confusion, then realization dawned on them.

Patronuses disappeared from the air. The lights flickered out. Again, the shaking occurred, but now a loud, resounding knock was noticed with it. All of the DA gathered in the very centre of the room, looking at one another and barely daring to make a frightened noise as their mirrors shook.

Harry set his jaw and clenched his fists. All at once, the mirror at the front of the room shattered and fell away. The students behind Harry raised their wands. He was suddenly aware of their youngest member standing close beside him. Nigel crept forward to peer through a hole that had formed in the wall.

“I’ll make short work of this,” Umbridge’s voice dictated through the wall.

Harry guided Nigel backwards, so he could look himself when he saw Umbridge raise her wand. Nigel moved back in front of the small opening and Harry pulled him away just in time to hear Umbridge say in her very distinct way, “Bombarda Maxima.”

The whole wall was soon crashing down in front beside and all around the students. Dust clouds rose to the ceiling, and Harry could hardly make anything out beyond the lenses of his glasses. The sounds clashed through the whole room as pieces of debris shot towards the children.
When the dust finally settled, Harry could see Umbridge standing front and center, leading a group that consisted of the Inquisitorial Squad, Mr. Filch, and the toad herself.

Inside, Harry’s insides churned with a feeling he couldn’t place. All he knew was that his blood was boiling. There was no forgiving him for this. After all, Joseph was the only person he remembered being missing today.

His breath was coming in short, angry pants. His jaw ached with how hard he clenched it. It seemed as though his whole world had come to a stop around him.

“Get them,” barked the pink toad, and before he knew it, Harry was being carted away by Umbridge’s goons.

“I’ve been watching them for weeks,” snarled the toad as Harry was yanked into Dumbledore’s office by none other than Percy Weasley.

“And see? Dumbledore’s Army,” the witch held up the signature paper, “Proof of what I’ve been telling you right from the beginning, Cornelius. All your fear-mongering about You-Know-Who never fooled us for a minute. We saw your lies for what they were: a smokescreen for your bit to seize control of the Ministry.”

Dumbledore was watching her, unmoving through her whole tirade. Harry was tense, sure that he was about to witness some repertoire of insults poor forth from the astute Headmaster’s wrinkled lips.

“Naturally,” Dumbledore said in the most placating tone Harry had ever heard.

He was aghast. What was Dumbledore thinking? Harry had to speak up. It wasn’t right to see Dumbledore take fault for what had been his doing.

“No, Professor!” Harry breathed, distraught, turning to the Minister, “He had nothing to do with it. It was me.”
Harry was wide-eyed, wanting only to keep he who was innocent from taking punishment. Whether or not Dumbledore had done anything about the Ministry until this moment was irrelevant. He was still a good man, Harry was sure. He certainly didn’t deserve whatever the Minister had planned for him.

“How noble of you, Harry,” Dumbledore cut in before the others could respond, “to shield me, but as it has been pointed out, the parchment clearly says Dumbledore’s Army, not Potter’s. I instructed Harry to form this organization,” Dumbledore continued, eyes now turning to the Minister, “and I, and I alone, am responsible for its activities.”

“Dispatch an owl to the Daily Prophet!” directed the Minister, “If we hurry, we should still make the morning edition. Dawlish, Shacklebolt, you will escort Dumbledore...to Azkaban.”

Dumbledore looked over at them, Kingsley in particular, then away as the Minister continued, “To await trial for conspiracy and sedition.”

“Oh,” breathed Dumbledore with a slight twinkle in his eye, standing and raising a finger, “I thought we might hit this little snag… You seem to be labouring under the illusion that I am going to - what was the phrase? - come quietly.”

The words seemed to have their intended effect of angering and confusing the room. Harry watched, enraptured in how Dumbledore was going to get free. He simply had to get free.

“Well I can tell you this: I have no intention of going to Azkaban,” he said very calmly.

The toad was climbing towards him and bit, “Enough of this,” in an enraged whisper.

“Take him!” she screamed out.

Dumbledore gave Harry the slightest wink, then Harry watched as Fawkes flew in from the window behind them, reached down to meet Dumbledore’s palms as they clapped, the whole room exploding into the fiery light of the phoenix as it disappeared. The strong wind from its wings knocked over many of those in the room and caused Harry to turn his head. When he turned back, Dumbledore had already gone.
“Woah,” Kingsley breathed as he looked around in amazement, “Well, you may not like him, Minister, but you can’t deny...Dumbledore’s got style.”

Harry glared at the new scar on his hand, but the pain that had been inflicted on him earlier by the blood quill was nowhere near as terrible as the guilt he felt as he watched his friends and fellow DA members walk out the Great Hall, holding their wrists, staring at the same words that were also now on their hands. Harry looked up to the sound of approaching footsteps and saw Joseph, looking shocked. Seeing him now, of all times, made Harry was to yell and break things. Deciding that doing either of those things, as well as hexing Joseph, would get him into more trouble, Harry turned and walked away quickly. As he did, he heard footsteps behind him. They got louder and louder, and soon, they were accompanied by Joseph calling his name. But he did not stop, he kept walking. He didn’t care or know where he was going, he just had to get away.

“Harry.” Joseph said as he finally caught up and took the Gryffindor’s wrist. “I was calling you.”

“I didn’t hear you.” Harry said, not looking at Joseph.

“Are you alright?” Joseph asked, lifting Harry’s hand to inspect it.

“Like you really care if I was alright.” Harry scoffed.

“Of course I do.” Joseph said, looking at Harry. “What’s going on?”

At this, rage completely filled Harry. It was one thing for Joseph to sell out the DA just to get back at him for kissing Cho, but he should’ve at least owned up to it.

“Stop playing dumb.” Harry said as he took back his hand. “You sold us out to Umbridge.”

“Harry, I’d never do that.” Joseph said, his eyes widening in shock. “Why do you think that I would?”

“To get back at me for kissing Cho.”
“Harry we’ve already talked about this, and forgiven you for kissing Cho.”

“Did you really forgive me, or did you say that just to get me to let my guard down? You’ve been planning on ratting out the DA all along, haven’t you? You really didn’t love me.”

“Harry, I haven’t been planning on giving the DA away to Umbridge, and I really did forgive. But how could you possibly think that I really didn’t love you?”

Joseph rarely showed emotion but when he did, it always meant that something serious was up. And right now, the Slytherin looked hurt. Harry wanted to apologise, and hug the taller raven. But another, more powerful, and seemingly foreign part of Harry was telling him that Joseph was the one who betrayed them, the one who tricked him into loving him, the one who played him for a fool from the beginning.

“Because you’re a Slytherin.” Harry said, his hand at his side gripping his wand tightly. “If that wasn’t enough, you’re parents were Death Eaters. And how convenient was it for the two of us to meet in the library when I wouldn’t be with anyone else, and you just offer to help me out of the blue. Everything is highly suspect.”

“Harry, I know that the circumstances of us meeting are suspicious.” Joseph said. “But I promise, my feelings for you are real, and I’d never betray you.”

‘He lies. He will use you again, and most likely bring you to your doom.’ A voice in Harry’s head said. “No, I won’t have you play me for a fool again.”

“Harry…” Joseph said, taking a step forward.

And suddenly, all the rage in Harry just burst, causing him to raise his wand, and launch a Stunning Charm on Joseph. The anger Harry put into the spell powered it up, and caused the Slytherin to fly back, hit the wall. Joseph crumpled to the ground unconscious, and Harry stared at him. With his head still spinning, and not knowing what to do, he ran to the Gryffindor common room and his dorm. As he shut his curtains and hid under the covers, he was hoping that all of this was just a nightmare.

“Can you believe it?” Harry heard as he walked into the common room.
He sneered, not looking at the source of the words. It has been a week since Umbridge busted the DA, but he was still buzzing with a hot energy he couldn’t explain. The next sentence uttered stopped him cold.

“Marietta Edgecomb of all people. I heard she’ll be in the hospital wing for almost two weeks with those boils,” one of the younger Gryffindor girls said.

“Wait,” Harry said, turning to her halfway to the portrait, “Did you say boils?”

The girl nodded, “No one knows how many, but one of the Ravenclaw girls let it slip,” she giggled.

“Do you know how long she had them?” Harry asked, head beginning to work ahead of himself.

She thought for a moment, “Maybe for a week or so? Yeah, I remember because it was the same night that Dumbledore left.”

“Thank you,” Harry said, already out the portrait door before the girl could respond.

He had to find Joseph. He had to apologize before it was too late. Godric, he had really screwed up this time. How could he not believe him? Joseph didn’t even have the boils…

Harry found himself running, searching. He had to find Joseph now… He headed straight to the library, knowing that his boyfriend was most likely there. His boyfriend. That’s right, would Joseph even still consider him as such?

Harry made it to the library and ran straight back to the corner where Joseph always resided. To his disappointment, the taller raven wasn’t there. Not even his book bag resided in the familiar seat.

Harry ran from Madame Pince’s harsh whispers of quiet, unsure where his feet were leading him, but gladly ready to follow. He traced the hallways; sprinted down the dungeon corridors...he even took a run by the forest just in case. Joseph was not anywhere that Harry could find him.
Harry crumbled onto the forest floor and leaned against the nearest tree. He let his face fall into his hands and wept out of stress, exhaustion, and disappointment in himself.

It was a long while that he spent there before Hermione and Ron found him. They forced Harry up and offered to join him for a walk. Harry only nodded silently and let his feet carry him without word towards the bridge into Hogsmeade.

“Harry, if it was anyone’s fault, it was ours,” Hermione insisted after several minutes of trying to convince Harry that the DA was the right idea and his reaction to Joseph was somehow justified.

“Yeah, mate,” Ron offered, “We talked you into it.”

Harry turned to them, halting on the bridge, “Yes, but I agreed. I tried so hard to help, but all it’s done is make it worse...I don’t want to play anymore,” he turned himself to gaze off of the bridge, “All it does it make me care too much. The more you care, the more you have to lose. Maybe this is better.”

He wasn’t sure whether he was talking about the upcoming war, Dumbledore’s rejection, or...Joseph’s. Well, maybe it was all three.

“To what?” asked Hermione, clearly worried, but acting cautious.

Harry swallowed and turned to face his two best friends, “To go it alone.”

Suddenly, their conversation was interrupted with a short whisper. The three turned to find Hagrid peeking around the corner of the bridge. The conversation would have to wait for another time.

Hagrid lead the three students away from the bridge and into the wood. The three were startled to find the centaurs speeding through the trees angrily. This, however, was not what Hagrid wanted to show them. No, it would never be that simple.

Harry, Hermione, and Ron were introduced to giant by the name of Grawp that Hagrid claimed was his brother. Looking up at the scarcely clothed being, it was hard to understand the purpose of this venture.
Harry found that it was even harder to understand the venture’s purpose while completed distracted. He didn’t really listen to or watch what was going on. He was still focused on how to make everything up to Joseph. He was more glad that anything when they left the forest. Harry was able to escape to his room, hiding beneath his covers as he prepared for the upcoming conversation. This was going to be difficult.

The day of OWLs came with Joseph still managing to avoid Harry at every possible opportunity. He had somehow managed to find himself a new spot to study in that Harry couldn’t locate. Or, perhaps, he just never left the Slytherin dorms except for class.

Even in class Joseph managed not to speak except when spoken to directly, but never in response to Harry. He now seated himself in the furthest possible seat from Harry, no matter how early the Gryffindor made it to his classes. Eventually, Harry had to give up the idea of confronting Joseph with an apology and begrudgingly took Hermione’s advice to let Joseph come to him.

It was terribly excruciating, though. The only reason Harry hadn’t completely fallen behind in every class was because he didn’t want to disappoint Joseph with terrible scores if they ever spoke again.

Today was one of those times that he had to shut everything else down in order to perform the way that Joseph would have wanted him to. He knew there was a chance these OWLs would be graded, so he’d have to at least pretend that chance was a good one.

He was scribbling his way through an explanation of a particular charm when suddenly there was a booming sound in the hallway outside of the exam room. Even Umbridge looked away from the students as the sound repeated, then repeated again. It was getting louder as though the source was growing closer. Harry turned to watch as she opened the door.

He almost smiled as the first firework entered the testing hall. Then, a scream of delight resounded as Fred and George entered on broomsticks, tossing dozens of fireworks into the room.

They let loose a giant dragon, which chased the pink toad out of the room, swallowing her as she ran out of the doorway. Though she was unharmed, the decrees nailed to the wall fell in torrents. The twins continued to wreak havoc, leaving swamps and delighted Poltergeists in their wake. The children of Hogwarts ran from their exams and clapped for the two gingers as they put on a show in the air.
Harry was delightedly clapping along until a sudden wave of pain shot through him, dropping him to the floor as a vision overtook his brain. Sirius...Sirius was being tortured. Voldemort had him tied up and was torturing him to get...a prophecy?

“Sirius,” Harry announced to Hermione and Ron as he stood.

He immediately started towards the castle, knowing this was their best opportunity to save him. They were already bounding up the changing staircases when Hermione got in into her mind to challenge this idea.

“Harry, are you sure?” she pleaded.

“Yes, Hermione,” Harry said without looking back, “It’s just like with Mr. Weasley. It’s the same door I’ve been seeing for months. And I couldn’t remember where I’d seen it before. Sirius said Voldemort was after something-something he didn’t have last time, and it’s in the Department of Mysteries.”

Hermione pleaded, “Harry please. What if Voldemort meant for you to see this? He’s only hurting Sirius to try and get to you.”

“So what if he is? I’m just supposed to let him die? Hermione, he’s the only family I’ve got left,” Harry looked back at his best friends.

Ron nodded solemnly, “What do we do?”

“We’ll have to use the floo network,” Harry said, already starting on the stairs.

Hermione followed, “Umbridge has them locked for surveillance.”

“Not all of them,” Harry said as they reached the top.

He led them right to Umbridge’s office, heading straight to the Floo.
“Alert the Order if you can,” Harry instructed.

Ron frowned, “Are you mental? We’re going with you.”

“It’s too dangerous,” said Harry, almost panting.

Hermione took his hand, already kneeling beside him, “When are you going to get it into your head? We’re in this together.”

“That,” interrupted a shrill voice that could only belong to the pink toad, “you are.”

The three turned to see the slightly-charred, wild-eyed Dolores Umbridge glaring down at them. Behind her, Draco was pushing Neville into the room.

“Caught this one trying to help the Weasley girl,” he sneered, pushing Neville harshly.

In moments, the office was filled with those Harry considered his friends. All were being held by one of Umbridge’s IS students, who sneered down at Harry. Umbridge bent over the raven-haired boy’s chair with a pathetic smile.

“You were going to Dumbledore, weren’t you?” she said in her faked voice.

Harry shook his head and was immediately slapped to the shock and horror of everyone in the room. Then, a voice he’d never thought he’d be happy to hear interrupted the proceedings.

“You sent for me,” stated the dull monotone of Severus Snape.

“Snape, yes,” perked up the pink toad, “the time has come for answers, whether they want to give it to me or not. Have you brought the Veriteserum?”

“I’m afraid you used the last of it interrogating students, the last of it on Miss Edgecomb,” he
stated matter-of-factly, making Harry’s gut drop like lead, “Unless you want to poison him, which I assure you I would have the greatest sympathy if you did, I cannot help you.”

Harry only had one chance left to save his godfather. He had to trust Dumbledore’s judgment, and, in turn, trust Snape.

“He’s got Padfoot,” Harry called desperately, “He’s got Padfoot in the place where it’s hidden.”

Umbridge was immediately furious and confused, “Padfoot, what is he talking about, Snape?”

“I have no idea,” Snape said calmly, turning and walking away.

Umbridge, without the eyes of Snape nor of the portrait of Fudge to watch her, decided the Cruciatous curse was the only solution. She raised her wand to Harry’s nose and went to speak when suddenly Hermione cried out.

It was only a few sentences later before Hermione had convinced the toad that there was a secret weapon hidden in the wood that Dumbledore never wished her to find. Harry and Hermione were forced out of the room, told to lead the toad to the weapon.

This was easy enough. Harry figured that Hermione would take them to Grawp, who would protect them at any cost. However, when they reached the wood, it seemed that Umbridge had almost caught on to the lie. In fact, she nearly turned on the two students when the centaurs found them.

It was just Harry and Hermione’s luck that they were familiar with the centaurs because they were in a state of great agitation. Umbridge’s first instinct was to harm the poor beings, but even Umbridge was no match for a combination of angry centaurs and protective Grawp.

The second they could get away, Harry and Hermione charged back towards the castle, not stopping to speak until they met their friends on the bridge.

“How did you escape?” Hermione exclaimed.

“Well, we had some help.” Ginny said
Harry raised an eyebrow, but he heard footsteps approaching. His eyes widened when he saw Joseph walking towards them.

“Well, I’ve just finished burning every bridge I’ve built since I was a child.” The Slytherin announced, and Harry opened his mouth to say something, but Joseph shook his head.

“So,” Neville interrupted, knowing the urgency of the situation, “How’re we getting to London?”

Harry was taken aback, “Look it’s not like I don’t appreciate what you’ve done - all of you, but...I’ve gotten you into enough trouble as it is.”

Harry started off, but was stopped by Neville’s voice, “Dumbledore’s Army’s supposed to be about doing something real. Or was that all just words to you?”

“Maybe you don’t have to do this all by yourself,” Ron offered.

Harry looked over the faces of his friends. He could tell they weren’t going to back down from this one. He then looked at Joseph, who was wearing his usual emotionless expression.

“Don’t even think for one second we’re letting you go alone.” He said, and Harry nodded, letting his lips form into a small smile despite himself.

“So how are we going to get to London?” he asked, returning his focus to the current situation.

Luna smiled softly, her eyes sparkling, “We fly, of course.”
Chapter 8

Chapter by LegendaryWrighter

Chapter Notes

Apologies for the late update. dracoluv and I have been extremely busy, and there have been unseen circumstances that made it hard to update the story, like a month long writer's block. We thank you all for your patience and hope you enjoy the chapter.

Chapter 8

It was an interesting ride to London. They were stacked on thestrals that only Luna and Harry could see. Harry rode with Joseph, the taller raven had his arms wrapped around the Gryffindor. Harry was terrified about what was going to happen, and was worried about Sirius, but felt safe and happy in Joseph's arms. Whatever happened today, he knew the two of them were going to be alright.

When they finally arrived in London, Harry could only think of saving Sirius, and hoped that Snape had come through for them, and had given the message to the Order. Every moment lost between his vision and finding Sirius was a moment too much.

Harry sped through the Ministry and all its blocking to the Hall of Prophecies. They had to be close now. There were cases full of glass orbs of different sizes on different sizes of pedestals. It was like a library made for viewing crystal balls. They all seemed dusty and foggy, like their purpose had been served long ago.

Harry stared down the long hallway, cases stacked three or four meters above his head. From behind them, a grumbling-creaking sound rumbled through the floor. Every head in the group swiveled towards the sound only to find that one of the wall-like pillars moving to the side to reveal another pathway through the cases. Harry immediately led his friends down this path, counting out the row numbers as they hurried through. Besides his whispers, their footsteps, and their breathing, there was no sound in the entire hall.

Harry breathed, “25.”

Everyone had gathered far behind him, following at a distance. Everyone except Joseph, that is,
who stood beside his boyfriend, bring a hand to his lower back and leaning in to whisper so softly the others wouldn’t be able to hear.

“Harry, I hate to say it, but we could have just walked into a trap” Joseph said warily.

Harry turned to him with a glare that soon melted to panic. It was then that Neville spoke. He was staring up at one of the shelves.

“Harry,” he said, voice full of soft panic, “it’s got your name on it,”

Harry stood stock still for a second, just long enough for Joseph to blurt, “But only those to whom the prophecy refers could find it.”

Harry shook his head and walked over to Neville, staring up at the orb whose fog had turned to swirling, glowing wisps. Everyone was still for fear of what may be inside. Harry reached for the prophecy and grabbed it.

To him it whispered in Trelawny’s terrible croak, “The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches...born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies...and the Dark Lord shall mark him as his equal but he shall have power the Dark Lord knows not… and either must die at the hands of the other for neither can live while the other survives… the one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord shall be born as the seventh month dies…”

Harry had been so lost in the prophecy that only Hermione’s yelling of his name made him look up from the orb to find that there was a Death Eater in a silver mask at the end of the hall.

Harry moved to the front of the group, wand raised towards the figure as he began to approach. Still, Harry stood unwavering.

“Where’s Sirius?” he demanded.

The figure approached still further, “You know, you should learn how to tell the difference between dreams…” he took his wand out to vanish his mask, revealing himself as Lucius Malfoy, “and reality....”

The Death Eater looked from Harry to Joseph, and scowled.
“I always knew there was something off about you and your parents.” He said. “I knew Draco made a mistake of befriending you.”

“The only mistake Draco ever made was thinking he needed the approval of a man who gets by by grovelling at the feet of those more powerful than him, and whose only success in life is being expelled from a birth canal.” Joseph returned, making Lucius frown more

“I’ll deal with you later.” Lucius said and turned his gaze to Harry. “Now, hand over the prophecy.”

Harry gritted his teeth and without hesitation, threatened, “You do anything to us and I’ll break it.”

Then a cackle erupted from behind Lucius and out stepped nonea lady cloaked in black laughing obscenely.

“He knows how to play!” pointed the witch as she began to tap her temple with her wand, “Itty, bitty, baby Potter.”

Neville took a slight step forward from behind Harry, breathing out, “Bellatrix Lestrange.”

“Longbottom? How’s mom and dad?” asked the mad witch.

“Better,” Neville spoke without hesitation, “now that they’re going to be avenged.”

Neville stepped to Harry’s side, wand raised, causing Bellatrix to do the same. Harry stuck his arm out to stop him, though.

Lucius raised his hands, “Now let’s-everybody-just calm down, shall we? All we want is that prophecy.”

“Why did Voldemort need me to come and get this prophecy?” demanded Harry. He felt a hand on his back and knew it was Joseph giving what support he could.
Bellatrix snarled, “You dare speak his name? You filthy halfblood!”

“It’s alright,” Lucius said calmly as Bellatrix turned madder behind him, “You’re just curious, aren’t you? Prophecies can only be retrieved by those about whom they are made...which is lucky for you, really. Haven’t you always wondered why there always seemed to be a connection between you and the Dark Lord? How come the Dark Lord couldn’t kill you when you were just an infant? Don’t you want to know the secret of your scar? All the answers are there, Potter, in your hand...All you have to do is give it to me. I can show you everything.”

At this point, Lucius and Harry were standing less than a meter apart. Harry set his jaw once more, watching as Death Eaters closed in from every direction.

“I’ve waited fourteen years,” Harry said.

Lucius nodded sympathetically, “I know.”

Harry shrugged, “Guess I can wait a little longer. Now!”

Everyone raised their wands, yelling “Stupefy!” as they attacked Death Eaters in all directions.

And, thus, the battle ensued. They were running from Death Eaters and shouting spells as they attempted to escape the Hall. They continuously split and regrouped in an attempt to distract the Death Eaters. Finally, they all ended up together. Ginny blasted a final reducto and the entire hall began to erupt with falling prophecies. They ran to the door as fast as they could, attempting to avoid any collisions.

As they leapt through the doorway, they began to fall and all were forced to stop themselves just before splatting on the ground. They landed in a round room with pillars around.

“Department of Mysteries,” regarded Ron, “Got that right, didn’t they?”

They all got their feet and looked around. The only object in the room was a sort of doorway that was filled with blue and white light which swirled like the fog of prophecies. Harry was lost in it, stepping closer to hear the sounds being emitted.

“The voices...can you tell what they’re saying?” Harry asked, stepping closer to the archway.
Joseph followed just behind him, concern flushed over his face.

“There aren’t any voices, Harry,” Hermione said matter-of-factly, “Let’s get out of here.”

Luna stepped closer to Harry, “I hear them too.”

“Harry,” said Hermione anxiously, “It’s just an empty archway.”

Joseph leaned to whisper in Harry’s ear, “Come on, love, we have to get out of here. Please, Harry.”

“Get behind me!” he suddenly yelled, turning completely around with his wand raised.

The others complied. Suddenly clouds of black smoke engulfed the area and Harry fell to his feet. When he could finally stand again, all of his friends had been taken captive by a Death Eater and he stood in the very center of the room, alone.

Lucius Malfoy walked out into the center of the room, a scowl plain on his face. Harry was quick to climb his way to his feet. He took a deep breath and planted his feet where he stood, knowing that the orb in his hand was the only thing keeping his friends alive at this point. Lucius walked forward, the heels of his shoes making loud clicks with every stride.

He chuckled darkly as he walked, “Did you actually believe- were you truly naive enough to think that you stood a chance against us? I’ll make this simple for you, Potter. Give me the prophecy now, or watch your friends die.”

Harry looked around at his friends, his mind and body agreeing that there was only one thing to do. His eyes locked with Joseph’s, who was being held roughly by someone who resembled Goyle. The Slytherin’s eyes were telling him not to give, to run and keep the prophecy from Voldemort. But he couldn’t let them be hurt because of his mistake. They never should have come. Harry sighed, about to give over the prophecy when suddenly-

“Don’t give it to him Harry!” blurted Neville, soon being shushed as Bellatrix yanked him back further, digging the tip of her wand deeper into the skin on his neck
There was risk in doing it, but Harry couldn’t let his friends die for him. He handed the prophecy to Lucius despite himself, but a light flashed behind the blond as he did as Sirius arrived. Lucius turned to see where Harry’s eyes had travelled and Sirius walked up, grunting, “Step away from my godson,” and punching Lucius square in the jaw.

Suddenly lights flashed around the room as more and more order members appeared before them. The Death Eaters began to scramble, Lucius breaking the prophecy in the process. The Death Eaters disappeared and soon reappeared around the room, spells flying everywhere.

“Harry listen to me,” Sirius leaned in, “Take the others and get out of here.”

“No,” protested Harry immediately, “I’m staying with you.”

“You’ve done beautifully, Harry. Now let me take it from here,” Sirius urged.

It was too late, as both were soon facing Lucius and Rodolphus. Godfather and godson stood, each fighting to protect the other as the onslaught of spells came. There wasn’t a moment to spare to look for Joseph or the others. There were too many spells coming for them to think straight.

Around the room circled the cackling laughter of Bellatrix Lestrange, putting Harry further on edge as her voice infiltrated his focus. Suddenly, Harry found himself disarming Lucius.

“Nice one, James,” said Sirius without thought.

Harry’s chest filled with pride at the name and he gritted his teeth to fight harder. Wordlessly, Sirius took Lucius on himself, not ceasing until the blond was completely without retort. Lucius was blown back, but immediately replaced with Bellatrix Lestrange who screamed out her curse before Lucius had time to hit the wall.

Harry had thought Sirius was fine. He was still standing after all, but everything slowed as he watched Sirius falling backwards into the veil and through it.

It clicked for Harry then. Of course only he and Luna could hear the voices from the veil...it was another bit of magic that only worked for those who witnessed death first hand.

His heart sunk to his stomach, and he moved forward desperately, wanting to run and grab him...
from the veil. Two arms latched around him, holding him back as he screamed with all he could for his godfather. For Sirius…

Harry spotted Bellatrix across the room, and in his anguish broke free from his captor’s arms, screaming as he chased her down. There was nothing else in the room but her shrill voice chanting a victory, “I killed Sirius Black!”

When he finally reached her, Harry shot the Cruciatus curse without thinking, holding it to her as she fell to the floor. A voice infiltrated his head, egging him on…telling him to hurt her…begging him to follow his dark desires.

“Do it!” screamed the voice.

Harry turned on his heel to find Voldemort behind him. He kept his wand raised, but it was soon shoved from his grasp by the Dark Lord. He stumbled towards him, pain from losing his godfather still aching in his chest. Still, he would not become like Voldemort. Sirius would have wanted better for him.

“So weak,” uttered the Dark Lord, nearly spitting it like poison from his mouth.

Then a voice started behind Harry, and he turned to find Dumbledore walking up from behind him. After all this time, now is when he chooses to involve himself in Harry’s life. Harry wasn’t sure whether he should be thankful or angry at him for not coming sooner.

“How foolish of you to come tonight, Tom. The Aurors are on their way.”

Voldemort nearly smiled at this, “By which time I shall be gone…and you shall be dead.”

In seconds they were engaged in a battle of curses and extraordinary transfiguration. There was fire and water on grand scales. There was shadow and glass and fine sand which erupted around them. It was beautiful, and it was terrifying.

When Voldemort realized he could not win with power alone, he dissolved, crossing the room until he could invade Harry’s body. He fell, his mind being filled with the presence of the Dark Lord.

His body contracted, “You’ve lost old man,” spoke Voldemort from inside Harry.
He forced the boy to relive his worst memories, feeling his pains over and over again.

“Harry…” begged Dumbledore.

“So weak,” chanted Voldemort from within Harry’s memories, “so…vulnerable.”

Dumbledore pleaded, “Look at me. Harry, it isn’t how you are alike. It is how you are not.”

Once again, the boy’s mind filled with his most personal memories. His mind flooded with pain and he felt angry. He tried to focus on Dumbledore’s words...but what did he have that Voldemort didn’t?

Harry could see his friends line up before him between the flits of his memories. That was it. It was them. The one thing that Voldemort would never have. Harry locked eyes with Joseph, trying to focus on him to ground himself.

“You’re the weak one. You’ll never know love or friendship...and I feel sorry for you,” Harry breathed.

Suddenly, there were flashes of painful memories, warped by the Dark Lord, but Harry fought them back with all the warmth and positivity in his own mind. Suddenly he was free, the sand around him frozen to disguise the Dark Lord as he stood above Harry.

“You’re a fool, Harry Potter,” he said in his soft, yet menacing tone, “and you will lose.”

There was suddenly more sound as more people arrived.

And with that, Voldemort was gone once again.

Behind him, Harry heard someone utter, “He’s back.”

Harry felt himself suddenly smothered as his friends collapsed around him, crying from happiness and clinging to one another. Finally, they were safe again. But it would never be the same. They knew that now. Voldemort was still out there. But, they were together. That’s what really
As soon as they returned to Hogwarts, Professor Dumbledore brought them all to the Hospital Wing. Harry was treated first and as soon as he was done, Madame Pomfrey moved on to the next ward. As soon as everyone else was done, they all went to Harry’s ward, hugged him and gave their condolences about Sirius. The others soon returned to their wards, except for Joseph who stood in front of Harry. The two stared at each other for a few minutes, relieved that the other was still alive. Then Joseph sat next to Harry and pulled him in for a deep kiss. They poured all their emotions into the kiss, all the pain, sadness, anger, and frustration.

“I’m sorry.” Harry said as he pulled away, tears starting to run down his face.

“Harry, you’re not to blame for Sirius’s death.” Joseph said, wiping Harry’s tears away.

“If I had just listened to Hermione...or tried harder in the Occlumency…” Harry said.

“Sirius’s death wasn’t your fault. You must understand that.” Joseph said. “And he died in one of the most honorable ways possible; not stopping Voldemort from getting a weapon that he could use to a great advantage, but protecting you, someone he loved. He wouldn’t want you to beat yourself up over this.”

“It’s not just Sirius’s death, or me leading us all into a trap.” Harry said. “I hate how I blamed you for giving the DA up, how I didn’t think to talk to you. Now, your family is in danger because of me.”

“Your emotions were being influenced by Voldemort’s, the weren’t yours to begin with.” Joseph said. “I don’t blame you for that. And don’t worry about my parents, they know how to take care of themselves.”

Harry and Joseph hugged each other tightly for the next few minutes in silence.

“What now?” Harry asked

“Now, we get some sleep.” Joseph said and helped the raven lie down. “Then, we focus on our
studies, and try not to die.”

“Well, that’ll be hard, considering what I get into.” Harry said, making Joseph smile.

Joseph tuck Harry in and stared for a few seconds before cupping the Gryffindor’s cheek and giving him a soft kiss.

“I love you Harry” Joseph said

“I love you too.” Harry replied with a small smile

Joseph gave Harry kiss on the forehead before leaving, and Harry fell asleep with a smile, and dreamt of an amazing date with his boyfriend.

The next morning came and when Harry woke up, everyone was already gone. After being checked up by Madame Pomfrey, Harry headed to his dorm to take a shower, and headed for the Great Hall. The first thing that Harry saw, which immediately made him smile, was that Umbridge was gone, and Hagrid, McGonagall, Trelawney, and Flitwick were back on their seats at the high table. The next thing he noticed was that the Slytherins didn’t have their Inquisitorial Squad Badges anymore. He did find it strange that Joseph wasn’t with his usual group until he remembered that Joseph would have had to fight them to help free Neville, Luna, and Ginny.

As he looked over his own table, he was a little surprised to find that his friends were looking sombre. After such a victory, shouldn't they be at least a little happy?

“What’s going on?” Harry asked.

No one replied. Hermione simply handed him that morning’s issue of the Daily Prophet. After Harry had read through the article and still looked confused.

“What about the article?” Harry asked. “Sure, they didn’t mention that we were there or the reason why so many Death Eaters were caught, but at least we finally got the Ministry to acknowledge Voldemort’s back.”
“Harry…” Hermione began, looking unsure of whether to tell him or not. “The article on the lower right.”

Harry stared at her for a few seconds before shifting his focus to the paper again. The picture above the article was that of a large mansion burning. Only when he read the title of the article below did Harry realise what had gotten his friends in a foul mood;

**Duskgem Manor Down in Flames**

_It was around two in the morning when tragedy struck Lancashire. The Forest of Bowland was brightly lit due to flames coming from the ancient Duskgem manor. Luckily, no muggles witnessed the burning thanks to the wards of the estate. Authorities were alerted immediately by protective wards on the manor, and aurors were on the scene in record time. Devastatingly, many of the items and furniture inside had perished, though the structure itself managed to survive. After investigating, aurors concluded that the fire had started from a candle which had fallen and left flames in its wake along the library floor. Stephen Duskgem, who is a healer at St. Mungo’s, and Alyssa Duskgem, a member of the Wizengamot, were able to send some short comments via owl this morning. Their letter revealed the shocking twist that they were both staying over at a friend’s house due to their over-drinking at a party the night of the incident. The couple also disclosed that they were saddened by the loss of their home, and that they would both be taking leaves from their jobs in order to process and move past this tragic event. The Duskgems have a son currently in Hogwarts who they will be pulling out of school for the rest of the year. A quick conversation with reinstated headmaster, Albus Dumbledore, confirmed this. Dumbledore further shared that the Mr. Joseph Duskgem will be given his year-end tests earlier due to the unfortunate events that had occurred. Let's hope he's ready. Now, we apologize, we were not able to get a personal comment from the young Duskgem. But he did reply to our owl. We share his brief statement below.

“Although I am saddened by the loss of my childhood home, I’m very glad that my parents were not there when the fire happened.”

_We know that there is nothing worse than losing…_

Harry finished the rest of the article, but he knew the fire wasn’t an accident, his friends knew, and he was sure the aurors knew as well. Harry scanned the entire Slytherin table, hoping that Joseph wasn’t gone yet, but he couldn’t find the taller raven. He then noticed Snape was not in his chair anymore, and was most likely on his way for the lessons for the morning. Not wasting another second, Harry stood and ran out of the Great Hall, ignoring the calls from his friends. Harry ran towards the dungeons and soon, he found the Potions Master in front of the potions classroom.
“Did you need something, Potter?” Snape asked in his usual monotonous voice.

“Joseph…” Harry breathed heavily. “Where is he?”

“I’m assuming you read today’s paper, so you should know that Mr. Duskgem’s home caught fire due to an accident.” Snape said

“You know that was a load of bull.” Harry raised his voice. He had no reason to, but he just felt angry. “The fire was intentional, and everyone in the Order, and the aurors who inspected it knew it too.”

“Of course we know it was intentional, but the public doesn’t need to know that.” Snape replied

“But why? Why are we keeping it a secret?” Harry asked. “Voldemort’s been outed, the people know he’s back.”

“Yes, and it has caused a great amount of panic already.” Snape said in a condescending tone. “The Prophet reporting that Duskgem Manor had been destroyed by Death Eaters would have caused more panic, and in order for aurors and the Order to do their jobs properly, then there must be order in society or else our jobs will get harder to do.”

“But why did Joseph have to go?” Harry asked, mostly to himself. “He could’ve stayed with me. Did he think that I couldn’t keep him safe?”

“Of course, because like your father, the great Harry Potter can do anything.” Snape said sarcastically with a sneer. “Do you know how selfish you sound? Where would he have stayed that would’ve made him safe? With you and those muggles? The Dark Lord is unforgiving to those who fail him, and even less so to those who betray him. He’d have his Death Eaters kill a thousand people, be they muggles or wizards, to bring back the traitors.”

Harry hated it, but he admitted to himself that he wouldn’t have been able to protect Joseph if the taller raven was with him. The only reason he was able to keep up with Lucius Malfoy and Rodolphus Lestrange was because Sirius was fighting alongside him. Harry’s heart ached. He had lost Sirius the night before and now, there was a high chance he’d never see Joseph again. He fought back the tears. He needed to get out of there, because there was no way he was crying in front of Snape. He was about to head for his dorm when he heard footsteps and saw Snape approaching. The Potions Master stared at him for a while before bringing out a letter and handing it to Harry.
“He did ask me to give this to you. It’s as if he knew you’d come to me to find out where he was.” Snape said before turning and walking away. “And before I forget, 20 points from Gryffindor for raising your voice at a teacher.”

Harry didn’t waste time, running straight to the Gryffindor common room, then his dorm. As he collapsed onto the edge of his bed, Harry stared at the envelope. He wondered what the letter said. His stomach turned, and he wondered if, maybe, it would be better off unread. Finally, after going through all the possible responses, best to worst, Harry opened the envelope, pulled out the letter, and read Joseph’s words:

Harry,

First, I’m sorry I didn’t do this in person. I was planning on doing so the night before after we returned from the Ministry, but Sirius died and I didn’t want to bring you down even more. I’m also sorry that I won’t be able to be there for you in the coming months. Not just to help you with the academic stuff, but with dealing with Sirius’s death. I know how much he meant to you, not just being your legal guardian, but also as a way to learn more about your parents.

I’m sure you’re worried about me, and you have reason to, but I have a feeling that my parents and I have a big chance of getting away. Before I helped your friends escaped, I told my parents of what I was about to do, knowing what the consequences would be. They took everything valuable in our home, stored it away and hid first. My mother then made contact with a friend of hers from the French Ministry of Magic, and she’s agreed to hide us in one of her homes, which will be placed under the Fidelius charm. If it’s just before morning classes begin, I’d say were already settling in.

Now, as much as it pains me to do so, I’m not going to promise that we’ll see each other again. A war is coming, and my recent actions have placed a target nearly as big as yours on my and parents’ back. I don’t want you to blame yourself for that. It was my choice.

But I will say this: I want desperately to see you again. I’ll be listening to the radio and cheering for you from the sidelines. I’ll do what is in my power to stay alive so we can see each other again one day. All I ask is for you to do the same.

But in the event that something happens to me, I’m asking you to move on. What matters most to me is your safety and your happiness, whether or not I am the source of either. If I can no longer be there for you, then please allow someone else to be there. And I will make the same promise to you, if anything does happen.
I love you Harry, you will always be in my heart and mind. You have a long and dangerous road ahead of you, we both do. Keep your friends close, learn every spell you can that you think will help you, and listen to Hermione. Merlin knows you’d be lost without her. At the end of all this, if we’re both still alive, I promise we’ll see each other again. Know that I’ll be thinking about you until that day comes

Forever Yours,

Joseph

Harry sat there, stunned, for a while. He then walked down to the common room, where Hermione and Ron were waiting for him. They sat down on the couch and Harry handed them Joseph’s letter. After reading, they hugged Harry tightly, and the raven sobbed

“I’m going to beat him.” Harry said after a while. “I’m going to beat him for Sirius, Cedric, my and Neville’s parents, for everyone.”

“You will, but you won’t be fighting him alone.” Hermione said with a teary smile.

“Don’t think we’re just going to let you take all the glory.” Ron said. “We know how much you hate being the centre of attention.”

Harry smiled and thanked his friends. As he went through the day, Harry could only think about beating Voldemort for the good of everyone. But on that day, he promised himself he’d beat Voldemort, he’d get through the war alive, and he and Joseph would see each other again.
Hello guys! It's dracoluv here. It's my turn to apologize for the lateness of the chapter. LW and I decided to have the busiest summers ever by taking extra classes and tutoring, so we were always exhausted when it came time to write. However, I don't believe that you'll be disappointed in the content we're giving you. It's quite a large movement in the story.

Enjoy!

Chapter 9

Harry sat on a hill, watching as his friends run around and enjoy themselves. After the year they had, they all deserved to relax. Harry stood to stretch, and smiled when Seamus tackled Dean to the ground.

"Looks like they’re having fun.” A voice said.

Harry turned and his eyes widened when he saw the owner of the voice.

"Joseph…” Harry said.

Joseph slowly approached; he looked a little taller and his face had slightly more pointed features. But he still had the short black hair that was combed neatly to the side, the silver, rectangular glasses, and the amber eyes that were showing so much emotion right now. Harry closed the gap and hugged Joseph tightly.

“I’ve missed you so much.” Harry said. “I was so worried about you.”

“Not as much as I’ve been worried about you. I was hiding in a house under the Fidelius charm, you were in the war.” Joseph said, his arms tightening around the shorter raven. “I wish I could’ve been with you through it all.”

“It doesn’t matter now. I’m just glad you’re safe.” Harry said.

Harry was smiling at Joseph when he felt a shift in the mood. The sound of his friends laughing had ceased and even Joseph was no longer smiling. The bright skies suddenly turned grey, and a chill went down Harry’s spine. The two of them drew their wands seconds before Death Eaters appeared and started attacking them all. Harry and Joseph drew their wands, stood back to back, blocking the spells coming at them. Harry and Joseph managed to stun the Death Eaters duelling them and without wasting a second, Harry and Joseph ran into the woods.

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Harry sat straight up in bed, panting desperately.

It was...a nightmare?

He groaned and shifted to hang his feet over the side of the bed, rubbing his eyelids. It had been
so long since Harry had slept through the night, but this wasn’t the first time that Joseph was to blame.

For the past ten years, Harry had often had dreams of Joseph, but it seemed they were becoming more frequent over the past month or so. It had been so long since he’d seen his former/current/whoknows boyfriend.

Harry sighed and stood up, going to shower. He wondered where Joseph was now. He had thought that Joseph certainly would have contacted him if he could. The former Slytherin must still be in hiding.

Throughout his morning, Harry developed theory after theory about what was keeping Joseph in hiding. He half-blamed himself. After all, if Joseph felt safe, then he wouldn’t have to stay so secretive. They could be together again. Well, that was the point of becoming an Auror, wasn’t it? As much as Harry hated fighting...as much as he hated being the center of attention...he had to make the world safer.

Still, he couldn’t help thinking that maybe it wasn’t enough. Maybe Joseph was safe. Maybe he had just grown out of Harry.

He shuddered, taking his dishes to the sink and cleaning up.

Maybe there was some way to find out for sure. Perhaps there was someone who Joseph felt safe keeping in contact with. Maybe...maybe Draco would know.

Harry cursed the idea. He shouldn’t go asking Draco for favors. They were only just getting on to a first name basis.

Besides, it was time for him to go to work. He couldn’t keep dwelling over it.

After donning his Auror robes, Harry headed through the Floo and into the Ministry of Magic. He was only a few feet in when he saw him standing there in the middle of the ground floor like he owned the place, talking to Susan Bones.

Draco Malfoy.

Harry took a deep breath. If this wasn’t a sign, he wasn’t sure what qualified anymore.

He cleared his throat as he approached the pair, “Susan, Draco...uhm would I be able to steal you away for a moment?”

Draco narrowed his eyes, sensing something was off. His curiosity piqued and the blond found the he was excusing himself from the conversation to follow Harry to a more secluded area.

“What is this about, Harry?” Draco urged, the name still feeling strange to say alone.

Harry spoke softly, “Look, I just can’t take it anymore. Is there...is there any way that you could get me into contact with Joseph? Please.”

Damn. Draco’s eyes had widened, then narrowed thin and aggressively. Was he going to punch him for asking?
“Why, Potter?” spat the blond.

“Because...because I still haven’t forgotten him. I need to see him...at least to let him know that he’s safe, now,” Harry pleaded.

Draco turned up the corner of his mouth, “Why now? Why not a year ago? Or four years ago?”

Harry’s gaze dropped, “I was so focused on the war before. Now I just closed what I think might be the last case on Deatheaters. Honestly. I think they’re done for. It’s been months since any noise has been heard from any of them... I think I finally fixed it.”

Still, Draco was not giving up his power over Harry, “His present location is secret for a reason, Potter. Don’t you think you might be part of it?”

Harry felt his stomach drop at the idea, but wouldn’t let Malfoy dissuade him. He’d come too far already.

“Don’t you remember what I did for you? All those testimonies. Day after day spent in the courtroom defending you and your mother... You’d be in Azkaban if it weren’t for me. I think Joseph’s location is more than a fair trade for all I’ve done for you and your family,” Harry’s words bit at Draco, as was obvious on his face.

No longer did he smirk. Oh no, Draco’s mask had fallen away and he sighed.

"Fine." Draco said with a sigh. "He better not figure out you got his address from me, Potter."

Draco summoned a piece of paper, a quill, and an ink bottle, and handed the written address to Harry with a scowl. Harry would focus on repairing his friendship with Draco later. Right now, Harry knew where Joseph was.

"I better get home and pack." Harry said as he stood, still staring at the address.

"You're going to go see him?" Draco said with a raised eyebrow. "Don't you think you should send an owl first?"

"I haven't seen Joseph in 10 years, and unlike you, I haven't been able to owl him." Harry said. "So yes, I'm going to go see my boyfriend."

Draco stared at Harry with the same blank expression Joseph used to make when they were still just getting to know each other all those years ago. After a few minutes, Draco nodded and led Harry to the floo. As Harry frantically packed for his trip, his mind returned to his thoughts this morning, and what he had said to Draco. Several questions swirled in his head; does Joseph still consider him as his boyfriend? Will Joseph be peeved off if he shows up without sending an owl first? Will they be able to converse as casually as they did before Joseph left or would everything be awkward and Joseph would return to giving Harry blank expressions again?

He didn’t have much time to follow these questions before he was fully packed for who knows what. He shrunk his trunk and put it in his pocket. With a heavy sigh to steady himself, Harry made his way to the floo. He flooed to the Ministry’s international terminal and used a floo there to get to the French Ministry of Magic. After sorting out papers and getting directions, Harry left and began walking. After several minutes of admiring the beautiful streets of Paris and stopping to ask for directions, he stopped in front of a building that Joseph supposedly lived in. He wondered as he entered why Joseph chose to live in a flat in Paris of all places. Though, he had to admit, hiding in plain sight obviously had worked.

After a few minutes, Harry stood in front of a door. If Draco gave him the right address, Joseph
would be on the other side of that door. Harry set his suitcase down and raised his hand to knock. Suddenly, all the doubts he had came rushing back. He wanted to see Joseph so badly; he wanted to hug him tightly and kiss him. But what if the taller raven didn’t want to do all those things? Harry shook his head and steeled himself. Taking a deep breath and gathering all his courage, Harry knocked on the door. He heard footsteps and soon, the sound of the door unlocking. Harry could barely contain his excitement and once the door finally opened, his eyes wide. Standing in front of him was a tall, gorgeous, half-naked man. Unfortunately, it wasn’t Joseph.
Chapter 10

It was a beautiful morning; the birds were chirping, the sky was clear, and a cool breeze pushed past the citizens walking around the city of Paris. The rays of the morning sun shone on the face of a tall, raven-haired male. Despite the clear sign that nature was telling him to get out of bed, Joseph merely turned and pulled his blanket over his head. He was about to fall asleep again when his blanket was pulled halfway down his chest. Joseph sat up slightly to glare, while the culprit merely smiled.

"Good morning." He said.

"Go away, Louis." Joseph returned, trying to pull the blanket over his head again, but Louis quickly pulled the rest of the blanket away before the raven could grab the other end.

"You have work. Go and get ready." Louis then left with Joseph's blanket.

Joseph sighed, but got up and went to take a bath. He really didn't want to go to work today, and if he wasn't living in a muggle building, he could've just transfigured something into a blanket and cast locking charms on his door. After bathing and getting dressed, Joseph left his room and was greeted by two smiling faces.

"Did you like your alarm clock?" The girl on the couch asked.

"No." Joseph replied as he plated his own breakfast. "And next time you send your boyfriend into my room, I'll hex his cock off."
"You're just jealous" The girl said playfully.

"Be nice, Jess." Louis said. "He didn't want to get up for work today."

At that, Jess's playful smile turned into a look of concern. After fleeing England with his family, Joseph had continued his studies in Beauxbatons. He met Jessica and Louis and they became friends. Despite adapting quickly, the raven never seemed at ease, much less happy, unless it was Potions class. He even started Beauxbatons' first Potions club, fashioned after Hogwarts', where students could hone their skills, whether they were passionate about the subject, or just wanted to get better grades. After graduating, Joseph was hired by one of the more successful apothecaries in the area, where he chatted with like-minded individuals, and experimented to his heart's content. So something must have been really wrong for the raven to not want to go to work.

"The boss's son starts working there today." Joseph said with a sigh.

"And that's bad because..?" Louis asked.

"Because he's an annoying, entitled brat." Joseph replied. "And the boss will assign one of us to orient him to how things were done in the apothecary, and I'm one of the more likely candidates."

"Well, it shouldn't take too long. I mean, his father runs the business." Jess said. "So if you get picked, spend a week with the twerp, and you can happily lock yourself back in your lab after."

"I guess." Joseph said as he took a bite of his toast.

After finishing his breakfast and his friends trying to convince him things will be fine, the raven headed for work. He greeted the few people he knew, such as the baker and the owner of a small bookshop. Once he reached an abandoned alleyway, Joseph apparated and landed on a cobblestone path in between a beautiful park and a large shop.

"Bonjour, Joseph." Someone greeted as the raven entered.

"Bonjour Michel." Joseph returned. "Any new orders today?"

"You know as well as I do that majority of it is for Bruise Paste." Michel said. "New Quidditch
season just started."

"Forgive me if I was hoping for something a little more challenging." Joseph said with a small smirk before frowning. "Are they here yet?"

"Not yet, but soon." Michel replied with a frown of his own.

"I'll be in my lab then." Joseph said as he gathered the new orders assigned to him. "Would be a shame if I got injured and had to be on leave for a month."

"If you're going through with that plan, then I want in on it," Michel said.

The two shared smiles before Joseph headed for his lab. It was half an hour later when Michel came in and called Joseph to come out. The raven lowered the flame on his cauldron before following his friend to the break room. There, he saw his boss, Gaspar, standing next to his son, Albert. Joseph saw some of the other staff standing in a line in front of them. Anna looked particularly annoyed, meaning she was brewing something complicated.

“Now that we’re all here, we can get started.” Gaspar said. “As you all know, Albert has recently graduated from Beauxbatons, and he will be joining us here. Some of you are already familiar with him, since he’s visited several times before.”

“Yeah, to get money from his daddy.” Michel whispered, and Joseph forced himself to keep from smiling.

“But he is not aware of how things work here.” Gaspar said. “Which is why I will be asking all of you, one week at a time, to teach him.”

Everyone nodded, all of them unhappy about it, before they were dismissed. Joseph was about to return to his lab when Gaspar asked him to follow. They entered the older wizard’s office, Gaspar offering Joseph a drink, who politely declined.

“I would like you to be the first to teach Albert how things are done here.” Gaspar said to Joseph. “You, out of all everyone else, has a firm grasp of every single aspect of this business.”
“Of course, sir.” Joseph said with a nod.

“Now, you’ve been here long enough to see that Albert wasn’t…” Gaspar began.

‘Polite, hardworking, humble…” Joseph thought, along with several more words.

“He wasn’t the nicest person to be around at times.” Gaspar said. “But he’s had a rough childhood; having to be witness to my and his mother’s arguments, the divorce…”

‘Yes, the person who got two birthdays, has two mansions to call home, and got twice as many presents than Draco had a rough childhood.’ Joseph thought, and it took all his willpower not to roll his eyes.

“So try not to take him too seriously with regards to what he says.” Gaspar finished.

Joseph assured his boss that he wouldn’t before leaving his office, and dreading the rest of the week.

“He actually said that?” Michel asked after Joseph told his friends about he and Gaspar talked about.

“No doubt he’ll have that talk with everyone once it’s their turn to babysit the brat.” Anna said, refilling her wine glass.

“He could’ve saved time, and just said ‘if my son acts like an arsehole or talks like an arsehole, you can’t blame him for it’ this morning.” Joseph said with a sigh.

“Come on, he can’t be that bad.” Louis said, and the three potioners gave him a look.

“He said that it was right that I spent all day in my lab brewing since I’d scare customers away.” Anna said, her anger showing in her eyes.
“He tried to get into the cupboard where we kept our more expensive and complicated potions.” Michel said. “When he got frustrated and casted a spell on it, it rebound and destroyed an entire shelf of Dreamless Sleep.”

“Surely his dad scolded him after that.” Jess said.

“Nope. He came in, told his son to be more careful, before telling me to clean it up.” Michel said, downing his glass of firewhiskey.

“It was not a good day.” Joseph said. “At least I’m first so I don’t have to dread about it.”

“After today, I don’t think I want him anywhere near the apothecary.” Michel said and Anna nodded.

“Look, once everyone is done ‘mentoring’ the brat, let’s all come back here and get hammered.” Joseph said, making his friends smile.

“Isn’t this week the last your boss’s son will be mentored?” Jess asked Joseph one morning, and the raven nodded.

It took two and a half months, but Albert would finally be done with his mentoring. Joseph did feel sorry for Hector. He was the last person to mentor Albert, and the brat had gotten used to the place and everyone, so he was a much bigger pain in the arse than he was when Joseph mentored him. The raven made a note to buy something stronger than firewhiskey for Hector. He was just about to leave for work when a screech owl with black feathers flew in, and landed on the empty chair at the dining table.

“Hey Nyx.” Jess greeted the owl, and gave her a piece of bacon.

“Is there a reason why Draco is writing to you?” Louis asked.

“How would I ever find out something as secretive as that?” Joseph asked sarcastically before
retrieving a letter and what looked like a rolled up stack of parchment.

After the war ended, Draco and Joseph started exchanging letters, and discussed the differences in how the French and British Ministries did things, the curriculum in Beauxbatons, current events, and just generally caught up with each other. Once majority of the escaped Death Eaters had been caught, Joseph moved to his flat, and Jess and Louis became acquainted with the blonde’s owl. Now, since both he and Draco are busy, they just sent letters every weekend, when one of them has a birthday, or it was a holiday. Another instance when they would send letters when it wasn’t the weekend was when there was an important event happening.

Joseph took the rolled up stack of parchment and untied the string. It turned out to be the latest issue of the Daily Prophet.

The Death of Death Eaters

By Rita Skeeter

That’s right. You’ve heard it here first, folks. Finally, the rest of You-Know-Who’s band of insane followers have been locked up for good! Our Saviour is, of course, Harry Potter. For the past 8 years, Potter has made it his personal mission to rid the world of any trace of the Dark Lord and his minions. Only now can we say for a matter-of-fact that every last one has been captured.

Nott Sr., father to one of Potter’s Slytherin classmates, was tracked down by Aurors Potter and Weasley at his hideout in Montana, United States. It appears that Nott had been able to disguise himself using polyjuice potion until making it to Montana, where he had simply begun a new life for himself. No news yet on how his son Theodore is taking this emotional blow.

Now, the question that everyone’s been asking: Is Harry Potter finally going to settle down and create some mini-saviours? Well, when we approached Potter himself with this question we were given only this:

“I am not in the market for anyone at the moment. I already have someone special, who I love dearly. He knows who he is. The last decade of my life has been spent trying to rid the world of evil in the hopes that he would see my efforts and find me. I’ll never give up hope on him. Why don’t you go tell your readers that?”

So, you have it here first folks. THE SAVIOR OF THE WIZARDING WORLD IS GAY and probably not taken. Wizards around the world, groom your hair and don your dress robes. You may be the lucky guy that The Chosen One has his eye on.
Joseph set the Prophet down. The Death Eaters were finally gone. Despite this news, Joseph didn’t know how he should feel. He should’ve been happy, right? He didn’t have to worry about suddenly being attacked anymore. And he was happy for his parents since they could go out of hiding now. Perhaps it was just the shock that after all these years, it was all finally over. Setting aside the Prophet, Joseph shifted his attention to Draco’s letter.

Joseph,

I was originally planning on telling you about this in our weekend letters. Since Skeeter was in charge of the article, I really didn’t think it was wise to believe it outright. But I talked to Harry about it and he confirmed the news.

Draco had been saying that he and Harry spent more time together. As head of the Malfoy family, his friend had great influence over the politics back in the English ministry, even more so since his family abandoned their past beliefs, and aided in the rebuilding their society after the war. He began working with Hermione, who had authored many new laws and revoked outdated ones. He and Hermione would usually take hours discussing current events, meaning he was invited for dinner, meaning Draco had spent time with Ron and Harry.

Joseph smiled as he remembered how Draco wrote at how awkward it was the first few times. He merely told the blonde that he should try and talk to the other two about neutral subjects, such as Quidditch. Draco took his advice, and while he and Ron were on neutral ground now, at least he and Harry became closer, even to the point where they would have lunch with each other on occasion. Joseph wondered what it had been like if Draco and Harry became friends when they met at Madame Malkin’s, but pushed the thought away and continued reading Draco’s letter.

Theo is fine. He’s staying with Blaise, because of course he is. When you come back, you need to talk some sense into both those idiots so they can get together already, and stop driving everybody mad. Anyway, Theo will make a statement about two weeks from now, when the news has died down. Won’t be long before the Ministry has a party in Harry’s name again.

Speaking of Harry, I expect he’ll be asking about you soon. He always said his reason for joining the Auror Department was to make our world safer, but we both know he just wanted to make it safer for you so you don’t have to hide anymore, perhaps safe enough to come back. Regardless, I want to know what I should do. Do you want me to tell him nothing, or that you’re safe?

And I know you always decline, but you know Blaise’s birthday is coming soon. He wants to see you, we all do. Blaise said it can just be a private affair and no one’s really opposed to that, ministry officials have become more intolerable now, anyway. Please reply soon.
Joseph set the letter down and took a deep breath in. Draco had mentioned before that Harry asked if the blonde knew where he was. Draco merely stated that Joseph was still living in the house under the Fidelius charm, which we wasn’t, but Harry didn’t pry or ask anymore after that. But now the Gryffindor would be determined to find out where he was. Recalling the shorter raven’s stubbornness made Joseph smile slightly.

“So, are you going let Harry know where you are?” Jess asked and Joseph saw her peering over his shoulder.

“You really shouldn’t read other people’s letters.” Joseph said with a glare before sighing. “I don’t know.”

“What do you mean?” Louis asked. “Draco expects him to ask for you soon, and you even saw what he said in the paper. He’s still has feelings for you.”

“I know, and I still have feelings for him.” Joseph said. “But it’s been 10 years since we last saw each other. We’ve both changed. What if things are awkward?”

“Even if you two had remained the same for a decade, things still would’ve been awkward.” Jess pointed out. “You guys will eventually talk about the war, and that can’t be a nice topic. But the point is that you need to see him, and if it is awkward, persevere and move past it. You did it once, I’m sure you guys can do it again.”

Joseph nodded after a few minutes. He had wanted to see his friends again, but never did. He was afraid that they were also different. That they’d have nothing in common anymore, and that the friendship would end. The only reason he thought Draco was still writing him because there were only so many things that words on parchment could convey. But now, he realised he was wrong. He wanted to see his friends, he wanted to see Harry, and he was going to.

Summoning two pieces of parchment, an ink well, and his quill, Joseph wrote two letters; the first to Theo, checking in on him and asking him to tell Blaise that he’d attend the party, and that it needn’t be a private event if Blaise didn’t want it to be. He then wrote a letter to Draco, stating that he would attend Blaise’s party and that if Harry should ask, he should give Harry his address. After sending his reply to Draco with Nyx, and his letter to Theo with his own owl, Joseph headed to work.
Chapter 11

Harry was sitting on the couch in Joseph’s living room. A minute after Joseph’s shirtless flatmate had answered the door, another head popped out of the door and Harry was able to ask if he had the right address. He was glad that he did have the right address and felt greatly relieved that the taller raven’s other two roommates were together. As he sat there, Jess and Louis left him to make some tea and discuss why Harry was there. He could hear them talking, but barely understood anything cause he never learned French. He never really saw himself coming to France to see Joseph.

“So Harry, what brings you here?” Jess asked as she and Louis returned with a tray of tea.

“I think it’s quite obvious.” Harry replied, thanking Louis as he was handed a cup of tea. “I’m here to see Joseph.”

“Why though?” Jess pressed on. “Joseph’s been here for the past eight years. You couldn’t drop by in that time?”

“Well, after the war, a lot of my friends and I helped in rebuilding Hogwarts, getting it ready for the next school year,” Harry said, “Then we finished up school. After that, I started training to become an auror, but I finished training early, given all the experience I already had. I then worked to catch all the escaped Death Eaters to keep them from doing any more harm. I thought maybe…”

Harry trailed off for a moment, shaking his head, “For the record, I had no idea Joseph has been living here for eight years. I asked Draco when we were starting to get to know each other about 3 years ago, but he had told me that Joseph was still living in the house under the Fidellius charm with his parents. I just...I assumed I hadn’t done enough to make him feel safe, so I worked twice as hard. I finally captured the last of the Death Eaters yesterday. The news should have been in circulation this morning.”

Jess and Louis both nodded, exchanging looks with one another. It was Jess that spoke first.

“I don’t think he meant to make you feel inadequate, Harry,” Jess said softly, reaching a hand forward to take his in comfort.

“So, where is he?” Harry asked.

“At work.” Louis said. “His shift ends at five, but he might get home a little late today.”
“Oh, well thanks. And sorry about the impromptu introduction” Harry said. “I’ll just go to a café or stay at the room I’m staying at while waiting”

“Don’t be silly, Harry. You can stay here, we don’t mind.” Jess said. “And we’ve always wanted to meet you.”

With that, the room fell into an uncomfortable silence. Jess excused herself after a moment, and it wasn’t long until Louis was following right after her. Harry sat alone on the comfortable couch shared by Joseph and his flatmates. In these moments, he finally took the time to look around and take in the apartment. There were very few pictures, especially when it came to Joseph. Most if not all of the pictures of Joseph were from his time in school. Harry gave a small smile, never did he think he’d see the taller raven in the powder-blue uniform of Beauxbatons.

“He always complained about the uniforms.” Louis said as he went to stand next to Harry. “Not just because of the colour, but because it was made of silk.”

“Well, he always preferred darker colours. I’m sure he’d rather sport Hufflepuff’s yellow than that.” Harry said with a chuckle. “But to be fair, he complained about our robes too. Usually when we had Care for Magical Creatures class outside and it was particularly warm.”

“Well, it’ll still be a while before Joseph gets back, and there’s not much to do here.” Louis stated before handing Harry a huge photo album. “I had gotten Jess a muggle camera during our fourth year, and she became obsessed. Majority of the photos will be of landscapes and random things Jess thought to capture at the time, but there are some with Joseph in them.”

Harry thanked Louis before sitting on the couch and started going through the album. Louis was right; a lot of the pictures were of landscapes, but Jess was a really great photographer. Harry had gone through several pages, and then he stopped at one. He stared down at the picture of Jess and Louis, standing in the middle of the gardens of the Beauxbatons grounds. On the left of Louis was the tall, spectacled, amber-eyed raven that Harry had been thinking of for ten years.

Harry didn’t know how long he’d stared at the pictures, but he didn’t care. Harry hadn’t seen or heard from Joseph in so long, and these pictures gave him a lot of what he’d been hoping for. He saw pictures of the taller raven studying, opening Christmas presents, and even attending social events. The last picture which had Joseph in it was of him, Jess, and Louis all sitting under a tree by a lake. Harry’s heart ached at knowing that the empty space next to Joseph in the picture was where he should’ve been.

Harry was brought out of his thoughts by the sound of the door unlocking, and Harry’s heart started beating faster. The door opened and he could hear two people talking to each other speaking in French Harry may not have understood what they were saying, but he knew that one of the voices belonged to the one he came here for.

“I’ll stay here and prepare.” Joseph said as he and another person came in carrying boxes.

The taller raven was about to continue when he turned, and his amber eyes met Harry’s green ones. Joseph set the box down and slowly walked towards Harry, making the shorter raven’s heart beat faster.

“Harry...is it really you?” Joseph asked.

“Yeah.” Harry replied, nodding slow.

Joseph lifted his hand, slowly reaching forward, and gently taking Harry’s. The long, slender digits felt cool on Harry’s skin. He squeezed Joseph’s hand slightly, and felt the other male’s grip
tighten as well. Harry was then pulled closer, and he felt the taller raven’s arms wrap around him tightly. Harry hugged back tight as he buried his face in Joseph’s chest, willing himself not to cry.

“I’ve missed you so much.” Joseph whispered.

“I’ve missed you too.” Harry returned, looking up at the Slytherin. “Not a day went by without me thinking about you.”

Joseph smiled, cupping Harry’s cheek gently. He then lowered his face, inching it closer to Harry’s until their lips pressed against each other.

To Harry, it felt as if the last decade of his life fell away. He was standing next to Black Lake in the fall and Joseph had just taken him into a surprise kiss. He was in their corner of the library, holding a hand under the table in secret. He was staring into Voldemort’s eyes in the Forbidden Forest, doing what he had to do.

When the kiss broke, Harry took a deep breath, looking into Joseph’s eyes. A second later and their mouths were meeting again. Harry held desperately to the taller raven’s clothes, forgetting about everyone else in the room. In this moment, Harry had his Joseph, and that was all he needed.
Chapter 12

Needless to say, their first hour or so together wasn’t the most comfortable one either had experienced. The fact that they nearly began shagging each other in the middle of the lounge in front of Joseph’s friends didn’t help, but it had been a long time since Harry or Joseph had seen each other, and while they had both played out this conversation a million times in their own heads, they were jumbled and awkward when they came face-to-face.

They helped with preparing for the party and over the course of the hour, more people arrived, most of them from Joseph’s workplace. Presently, Harry was seated on the couch, with Joseph next to him, playing with his fingers on his thigh as Louis tried to embarrass the taller raven.

Joseph protested a story about his first real taste of alcohol and how it had apparently resulted in a one-man recreation of every Celina Warbeck song that could come to mind. Suddenly, Harry looked up at him in awe.

“You've got an accent now,” Harry said softly, interrupting Joseph’s pleas and causing the room to go quiet.

Joseph blushed slightly, “Do I really?”

Harry nodded, “Just slightly...like a whisper over the top of your voice. I like it...it’s kind of sexy.” Then, as if only now realizing what he had said, Harry blushed and looked at his fingers.

Joseph smiled softly, “It’s okay for you to call me sexy, Harry. We did just make out for a few minutes in front of everyone.”

Harry blushed and nodded, “Right. So it’s official then? We’re together, right?”

There was no hesitation to Joseph’s nod.

“So the question then,” Harry said carefully, “Do we count the last decade?”
At this, Joseph went quiet. His eyes cast themselves to the side as he began to think through the question, weighing his own feelings with the truth of the past. Finally, he made eye contact with Harry.

“If you want to, then yes because I would like to,” he said seriously.

Harry couldn’t contain his smile, “Of course I want to. I’ve always had you in my heart. You’ve been my one and only this whole time.”

Joseph’s smile was almost shy in its quiet meaning, “I love you, Harry.”

“I love you too,” Harry said, though he nearly didn’t finish because he was being kissed and he was kissing and the whole world was happily his.

The two pulled away with huge blushes when Michel cleared his throat. Despite nearly making out in front of Joseph’s friends again, Harry was less awkward and talked more. But he realised that going back to the way things were before Joseph left, even though they both agreed to count the past decade, wasn’t going to be as easy as he thought. Joseph and his friends talked about events that only they knew about, told inside jokes, and all Harry could do was offer a small smile and nod from time to time. A few minutes later he excused himself and entered Joseph’s room.

Harry sat on the taller raven’s bed and looked around. He was kinda expecting that there’d be little photos of Joseph in the lounge, but he didn’t expect that there wouldn’t be a lot of photos in his own room. There was a photo of him and his parents on his desk, and about four other framed photos on the wall; one where he was younger with Draco, Blaise, and Theo. Another one showed him, Jess and Louis in muggle clothing at a cafe. And the final two photos were of Joseph at his graduation, one with his parents and the other with his friends.

“Harry” He heard Joseph say as he entered. “Are you alright?”

“I’m fine” Harry replied, but Joseph looked unconvinced.

“I know you better than that” Joseph said as he sat next to Harry. “What’s going on?”

“I’ve wanted to know what you’ve been up to since we last saw each other” Harry said. “But now, I’m hearing about it all, from you and your friends, and I feel sad that I wasn’t there to experience those things with you.”
“I know what you mean” Joseph said as he took Harry’s hand. “What I hated most about being in hiding was that you were in a war, you were fighting Death Eaters and Voldemort, and I was safe and sound in a French chateau. I wish I was there for you. I wish I fought alongside you.”

“I want us to move forward, but I do want to hear about you and what you did, and not ignore it because I can’t handle hearing about them” Harry said.

“How about instead of hearing things from our friends, we tell each other ourselves?” Joseph suggested.

“Do you think that will work?” Harry asked.

“I think so” Joseph said. “When I learned things from Draco, about my friends and you, it felt like I didn’t fit into our group anymore.”

“I kinda felt like that” Harry nodded. “When should we do it?”

“How about now?” Joseph suggested.

“Don’t you have to get back to the party?” Harry asked.

“It’s fine, we’re not celebrating an important event” Joseph answered. “Let me just tell Jess to tell everyone not to disturb us.”

While Joseph returned outside, Harry went into the bathroom to use the loo. After he washed his hands, Harry looked at himself in the mirror, and then only realised how many horrible things he’d have to talk about with the taller raven; nearly killing Draco in the girls’ lavatory, Snape killing Dumbledore, Voldemort murdering Snape ‘cause he thought Snape was the master of the Elder Wand, and all the people that died.

“Harry, are you alright?” Joseph asked when he knocked
“Yeah. I’ll be out in a sec” Harry called back.

He glanced back into the mirror one more time before heading out the door. He was about to warn Joseph that some things he may talk about would be unpleasant, but he forgot that, as well as how to speak, when he saw that the Slytherin was lying on his bed, in just his boxers and a tight fitted shirt.

“Joseph...you stripped down” Harry said, a blush growing on his face.

“You can to if you want” Joseph said. “No one will bother us. And I’ve put up locking and privacy charms.”

“But I don’t have my clothes with me” Harry said, cursing himself for sending his luggage to the hotel he was staying at.

“It’s alright, you can borrow one of my shirts” Joseph said.

Joseph then stood and opened his closet while Harry began slowly taking his pants off. As he began pulling off his shirt, he just realised that he and Joseph had never been intimate with each other. If he was being honest, he probably never saw Joseph without his shirt on.

“Here, this should be comfortable” Joseph said and Harry turned to see him bringing over a red pyjama top that had a golden trim.

“Shouldn’t you be disowned by Slytherin for having something in that colour scheme?” Harry asked.

“Don’t really care” Joseph replied. “It’s soft and helped me sleep on nights I really missed you.”

“I get that” Harry said with a nod. “I went as far as buying a Potions book to make it seem like you weren’t so far away.”

Joseph smiled, and leaned down to give Harry a short kiss. After pulling away, he helped Harry put the shirt on. After buttoning up, the taller raven smiled more since the shirt was too big on Harry; the hem reached halfway down his boxers, only the tip of his middle fingers could be seen
if he kept his arms straight, and he could still see the Gryffindor’s collarbone even without the top button unbuttoned.

“Do...do I look okay?” Harry asked shyly. He was also self-conscious about how he looked, since he was underfed and lived in a closet for the first ten years of his life. Even though people have commented that he had gotten more attractive, and he was aware of that, he was always afraid that he wouldn’t be up to the standards of certain people, like a former Slytherin with an unreadable poker face. So it was a mixture of relief and surprise when Joseph leaned down and kissed Harry again, a little bit longer this time.

“You look gorgeous, as always” Joseph said when he pulled back.

He then sat with Harry on the bed, taking both their glasses off and setting them on the side table.

“So, what do you want to talk about first?” Harry asked as they lied down and faced each other.

“Well, I’m pretty sure you’ll have more heavy stuff to talk about” Joseph said. “I can talk about my stuff first.”

“No, I can go first” Harry said. “At least we can end with happy memories.”

“Alright” Joseph said. “If there’s anything that’s too much for you to talk about, you can skip it.”

Harry nodded, but he had no intention of skipping anything. Other than Joseph not being by his side, there were so many things that kept Harry up late at night. Maybe finally talking about them with Joseph because he wasn’t in the war, he wasn’t a part of all of those horrible experiences, maybe it’d help Harry move on.

“Should I start the day after you left?” Harry asked.

“When you want” Joseph said, and took Harry’s hand in his.

“Well, the day after you left and the months that followed were extremely hard” Harry began. “Not just because you were gone, but because Sirius died.”
“I’m so sorry Harry” Joseph said as he squeezed the other male’s hand. “I wish I was there for you.”

“No, if you had stayed, I would’ve lost you and Sirius” Harry said and shook his head when Joseph opened his mouth to say something. “If you keep interrupting, this is going to take longer than it needs to.”

“Alright” Joseph said with a nod.

Harry took a deep breath and began talking again, summarising the rest of that school year and the following summer quickly. While he did, Joseph squeezed his hand when he needed comforting, and that helped Harry a lot. He felt pretty good after that first bit, but now he had to talk about his sixth year.

“So, things are going to get hard to talk about” Harry said, and Joseph nodded. “I assume Draco told you what he was tasked to do.”

“He did” Joseph said with a nod.

“I’ve gotta ask you this first” Harry said, looking up into Joseph’s amber eyes. “Dumbledore offered to help Draco, to protect him. He was about to take it when Bellatrix and the other Death Eaters arrived. Would you have done it, or would you have taken Dumbledore’s offer?”

“If I was the only one in danger if I had failed, then yes I would’ve taken Dumbledore’s offer” Joseph said. “But that wasn’t the case for Draco, and it wouldn’t have been the case for me if I was assigned that task. Of course father and mother would have told me to take the offer and protect myself, to not become a murderer for their sake. But I would’ve done it.”

“You would have?” Harry asked. There wasn’t shock, surprise, anger or any kind of emotion going through Harry. He was truly curious.

“I would do anything and everything to protect my friends and family” Joseph said before gently cupping Harry’s cheek. “You most of all.”

Harry nodded, and began talking about how the first half of his sixth year went. He left no details out, no matter how hard it was for him. Then came the part of the year that Harry didn’t want to talk to Joseph about, possibly because he didn’t know how the taller male would react.
“So, did Draco tell you what happened between us in our sixth year?” Harry asked.


“That’s all?” Harry asked.

“Yes. Why?” Joseph asked in return.

“Well, it’s not pleasant to talk about” Harry said. “And I’m afraid of what your reaction is going to be.”

“I promise that I’ll keep my reaction to a minimum” Joseph said, and Harry nodded.

“So, like I said, Draco’s first attempt at killing Dumbledore was having a cursed necklace delivered to him by Katie Bell under the influence of the Imperius curse. Unfortunately, curiosity got the better of her, and she opened the package” Harry said. “The day Katie was out of the Hospital Wing, I approached her and while I was trying to get information on who gave her the necklace, I saw Draco enter the Great Hall. When he spotted us he looked terrified and left. I followed him to Moaning Myrtle’s Bathroom, and we dueled each other.”

“Okay” Joseph said with a nod, squeezing Harry’s hand.

“Well, the duel was intense and Draco was about to use the Cruciatus curse on me, so I used the spell in Professor Snape’s old book that was simply labeled for enemies ” Harry continued and let out a shaky breath. “His clothes ripped as if they’d be slashed with a sword and...and blood spurted out. Draco...he lied there losing blood quickly...and all I could think about was that I didn’t know the spell would have that effect. If Professor Snape hadn’t gotten there so quickly, Draco probably would’ve...he would be dead.”

Harry held back his tears and looked up at Joseph. He expected him to look surprised, shocked or angry. He expected him to show some emotion, but Joseph was just staring at him blankly.

“Why are you staring at me like that?” Harry asked.
“I promised to keep my reaction minimal” Joseph said.

“This isn’t minimal, this is no reaction whatsoever” Harry said. “You just heard that your boyfriend nearly murdered your best friend, that I didn’t call for help. Why aren’t you angry or sad or anything?”

“I’m feeling a lot of things right now” Joseph said, pulling Harry close until they were pressed together. “But I can tell that telling me that was hard for you, recalling it seems hard for you, and I don’t want to make you feel worse by yelling or crying or whatever.”

Harry couldn’t believe it; Joseph wasn’t getting mad about him nearly murdering Draco because he was thinking about his feelings The Gryffindor buried his face in Joseph’s chest, letting his tears fall, and felt one of the Slytherin’s arm tighten around him while his free hand rubbed Harry’s back comfortingly. As Joseph whispered comforting words into his ear, Harry couldn’t believe how lucky he was.

“Can you tell me what you were feeling when I told you?” Harry asked once he had calmed down.

“Like I said, I was feeling a lot of things” Joseph replied, still rubbing Harry’s back. “Mostly regret. Regret of not being there. If I had been there, maybe I could’ve mediated a meeting between you two, or got you to understand the situation Draco was in. If I was there, maybe you wouldn’t have had to be in that position in the first place.”

“Are you mad at me?” Harry asked.

“Of course not” Joseph said. “You were in a tough and desperate position. You used a spell that was meant for enemies, you can’t be faulted on that.”

“But I didn’t know what the spell did” Harry said.

“Draco was about to use the Cruciatus curse on you” Joseph reminded him. “You used the spell as a means of self-defense.”

“That’s not an excuse” Harry said. “What if the spell had killed Draco?”
“I would’ve been sad, and immensely angry, but I would have forgiven you in time” Joseph said. “Harry, in war, you have to be willing to do anything and everything to survive. Self-preservation is a natural instinct, you can’t be faulted for wanting to protect yourself.”

“But why have you forgiven me so quickly?” Harry asked.

“Because you didn’t mean to hurt Draco that much” Joseph said. “And you’ve more than made up for it. Not just by beating Voldemort, but by risking your own life to save him from the fiendfyre in the Room of Requirement.”

“You know about that?” Harry asked.

“It was one of the topics Draco talked about most when we started writing to each other again” Joseph replied. “Mostly, he thought you’d let him burn because you hated him, and he wondered what he should do as a thank you.”

Harry chuckled, recalling that random Tuesday he found an envelope addressed to him, and inside were tickets to the British National Quidditch Finals.

“I just hope Draco can forgive me eventually, but I won’t blame him if he doesn’t” Harry said.

“He’s forgiven you” Joseph said, and Harry looked up at him

“Did he tell you?” Harry asked, and Joseph shook his head. “Then how do you know?”

“Growing up, we were trained to always wear masks” Joseph said. “Every single person we knew, even the ones we considered friends, were potential threats, and we shouldn’t or couldn’t let them know too much. We shouldn’t show weakness and to many people, Voldemort included, emotions were considered weakness.” Harry nodded and hugged Joseph tighter, recalling how stressed and sad the taller raven was during their fifth year because he couldn’t trust his friends as much as he wanted to. “The reason I think Draco’s forgiven you is because he hasn’t brought the incident up. Because emotions were considered weakness, we were taught to push them down, so majority of us don’t handle emotional situations well. Draco is not just sparing himself of the awkwardness and emotional moments that talk would entail, but you too. And if he hadn’t forgiven you, he’d bring it up every time you were arguing, you two wouldn’t have gotten to a first name basis, and he wouldn’t have asked me for advice on how to be friendly with you.”
Harry smiled and gave Joseph a short kiss.

“What was that for?” Joseph asked.

“For just being amazing” Harry said, and Joseph nodded with a smile.

“Do you want to keep going, or should we pick this up tomorrow?” Joseph asked.

“I think I’ll lose my nerve if I don’t just let it all out now” Harry said. “I just need a minute.”

“Alright, love” Joseph said, placing a soft kiss on Harry’s forehead. “Take as much time as you need.”

Harry smiled, taking a few minutes before continuing to tell Joseph about what had happened since he left.

Harry woke the next morning to the sound of chirping birds, a few rays of sunshine getting into the room through the gap between the curtains, and Joseph’s arms wrapped around him. He recalled that they had gotten through everything, and after everything, most especially the tears, Harry and Joseph felt a weight had been lifted. They agreed that they still needed to get to know each other again after ten years, but that really uncomfortable awkwardness was gone, and it was replaced with excitement to learn about each other.

“Like dating for the first time again” Harry had said the night before, and Joseph agreed. While the Gryffindor couldn’t wait to get started, he would relish being in his love’s arms again for a little while longer. He’s been through hell and back just for this moment, and he would do it all over again for the man he loved.
Chapter 13

Chapter 13

It had been two days since Harry and Joseph talked about the war, and everything turned out so much better than either had hoped. Thanks to them getting that topic off their chests, talking to each other about things had become much easier. The day after, Harry and Joseph walked around Paris, visiting the taller raven’s favourite places, talking about their lives.

The next day, Harry allowed himself to become a tourist and Joseph gladly brought him to the usual tourist attractions, while Jess came along, bringing them to places that only people who lived their whole lives in Paris knew about. They visited the Arc de Triomphe, Notre-Dame Cathedral, a cafe that they had to navigate several alleyways to get to, and they even dropped by the Avenue des Champs-Élysées where Harry bought some things for himself and his friends.

While they visited many amazing places, Harry’s favorite part of the day was when they were on top of the Eiffel Tower. Cliche, yes, but Harry didn’t care. Everything was just perfect when he was looking over the city, with Joseph having his arms wrapped around him from behind. Harry felt a little weird being all romantic with Jess around, but was glad she came. Harry got to hear more stories about Joseph when he was studying at Beauxbatons, and he was extremely grateful when she handed him a bunch of pictures of their day.

“Harry, time to wake up” He heard Joseph say as the taller raven gently nudged him. While he was all for spending more time with his boyfriend, he was still pretty tired.

“Five more minutes” Harry said, pulling the blanket over himself.

“Nope, we’ve got to go now” Joseph said as he tugged on the blanket. “Don’t make me use my wand,”

Harry’s half-asleep mind pondered on what Joseph meant by that. But he didn’t need to strain himself since a few seconds later, he jumped out of the bed screaming when it felt as though a needle had poked one of his arse cheeks.

“What was that for?” Harry asked, glaring at the Slytherin who had his wand out. “It’s not even six in the morning.”
“You promised me last night you’d go with me this morning to the market” Joseph said before starting to make the bed.

“When people say they’re going to the market in the morning, they usually mean after seven” Harry said still rubbing the place Joseph had cast the Stinging Hex on.

“Usually, those people don’t get the best products” Joseph said. “Go and get ready.”

Harry sighed, but nodded and headed into the bathroom to take a shower. While he did agree to it and he wanted to spend as much time as possible with the Slytherin, Joseph could’ve given Harry a heads up that they were leaving the flat before six. After a quickly showering and brushing his teeth, Harry put on a pair of jeans, a green shirt, and some sneakers.

“Can you tell me why we’ve woken up at an ungodly hour to go to the market?” Harry asked as they walked.

“Because I want to get some fresh ingredients to cook with for the dish we’re bringing to dinner with my parents” Joseph replied, and Harry’s mind was finally fully awake.

“We’re having dinner with your parents? Why didn’t you tell me?” Harry asked.

“I told you last night” Joseph said before giving Harry a confused look. “Are you really that much of a lightweight? When I went to bed, you had only had three glasses of wine.”

“I didn’t wake up with a hangover” Harry said. “Jess did give me something else to drink. She said it was her specialty.”

“Of course” Joseph said with a sigh while shaking his head. “Jess was able to create an alcoholic drink that, thanks to her slightly above average skill in potion making, won’t give you a hangover the next morning.”

“That sounds like a lot of people’s dream drink” Harry stated, groaning as he recalled the massive hangover he had the morning after Dean and Seamus’s stag party.
“The only problem with it is that the alcohol content is extremely high, nearly as high as that of absinthe” Joseph stated. “People do stupid things when they have that much alcohol in their bodies. And since you didn’t have the hangover this morning to remind you any mistakes you made the night before, you just went through your day normally.”

“I guess the downside is pretty bad” Harry said. “Imagine walking to work the next morning, but being arrested because you streaked through a park.”

Joseph nodded and they switched topics. Harry was surprised to see so many people when they arrived at the market.

“Does everyone in Paris get up before five to go to the market?” Harry asked.

“Only those who want the best and freshest stuff” Joseph said. “And most of these people are chefs from the restaurants in the city.”

“So, what are we looking for?” Harry asked.

“You shouldn’t go to a market with a specific recipe in mind, Harry” Joseph replied. “You could, but what happens when they don’t have what you’re looking for? Or they have it, but it’s not of the best quality? When you go to the market, you have to be open and allow yourself to be inspired.”

“Did you go to culinary school while you were here?” Harry asked, but smiled at Joseph talking so passionately about something his friends back in England would never even consider doing.

“The first year we started living at our flat, I was either at work or in my room” Joseph said. “Jess suggested I take up a hobby, and suggested cooking. I really didn’t want to at first, but decided to try it since it would get Jess off my back, and it was very similar to potion making.”

“I wonder what Draco would say if he knew you cooked yourself” Harry said.

“He knows, and his exact words were ‘was it your exile or the French that’s driven you mad?’” Joseph said, making both of them laugh. “But I didn’t care what he or anyone else thought. I liked to cook, and he quickly changed his tune when I sent him a box of homemade macarons.”
“Will I be able to taste those macarons soon?” Harry asked.

“Just wait until dinner and you’ll have something better” Joseph said with a smile, and Harry nodded.

The two spent the morning shopping for ingredients, before having breakfast back at the flat with Jess and Louis. The rest of the day was fairly uneventful; other than trying to recall what happened the night before after Joseph went to bed, Harry spent most of the time writing letters to Hermione and Ron. When Joseph went to start cooking, Harry began getting nervous. He was going to meet Joseph’s parents for the first time. Him, the reason why they had to flee the country, and why their family’s manor, a building that belonged to several generations of their family, was burned down by Death Eaters.

“You look pale, Harry” Jess pointed out. “Did you recall doing something terrible last night?”

“No, I’m just quite nervous about meeting Joseph’s parents” Harry said with a sigh.

“You don’t need to worry” Louis said. “They’re both very nice.”

“Well, you’re not the reason they had to flee their country” Harry returned.

“Harry, I’m sure they don’t hold that against you” Jess said. “It was Joseph’s decision to help you, and he helped you because he loved you. I’m sure his parents think that that is a much better alternative to pretending to serve the Dark Lord, who could’ve tortured them or their son when he felt like it.”

Harry nodded feeling slightly better, but still unsure.

“If you still have doubts, why don’t you butter them up with presents?” Jess suggested.

“You think it'll work?” Harry asked.
“At the very least, it’ll keep them from bringing up what happened back in England until the end of dessert” Jess said, and Harry nodded. “I’ll come with you.”

“Thanks, you’d be a big help” Harry said with a smile.

“Hey Joseph, Harry and I are going out for a while” Jess said as she gathered her stuff.

“Fine, but be back by five” Joseph returned. Harry and Jess agreed and went on their way.

“So, what should I get?” Harry asked. “I only know about Joseph’s parents, I’ve never met them in person.”

“Well, his mom will be the easier to shop for between the two” Jess said. “You’ll be fine with a nice bouquet of flowers.”

“Alright” Harry said with a nod. “Well from what I remember, Joseph and his dad a nearly similar. Maybe I can get him a book on healing magic.”

“That’s a great idea” Jess stated. “We can head to the Ville de Flamel and look for one.”

“Where?” Harry asked.

“The Town of Flamel” Jess answered with a smile. “It’s our version of Diagon Alley but instead of a long winding alleyway, it’s an entire town.”

Harry nodded and followed Jess into an empty alley. Once they were sure they were alone, Harry grabbed on tightly to Jess’s arm and immediately felt the strong pulling sensation of Disapparition. Harry soon felt his feet touch solid ground again, and he stared in awe around him; he was standing in the middle of a huge park that was full of blooming flowers and topiaries, and a statue of Nicolas and Perenelle Flamel in the middle. Surrounding the park were several shops of different varieties, and Harry was sure that the cobblestone roads led to more.

“This place is amazing” Harry said.
“I would think so” Jess said as she took Harry’s wrist and started leading him.

“How did this place come about?” Harry asked. “And why is it named after Nicolas Flamel? Was this where he was born?”

“Joseph was right, you are a curious one” Jess said, and smiled when Harry blushed. “No, this wasn’t where Nicolas Flamel was born. He lived his whole life in Paris. This place came about and was named after Flamel because he was just a good person.”

“Really?” Harry asked.

“He was able to create the Philosopher’s Stone, which could turn any metal into gold” Jess reminded. “He and his wife could’ve hoarded that or just used it for themselves, but they donated to several charities. They even donated to churches, who were the ones advocating for the hunting wizards and witches at the time. One of his friends passed and left this land to him. Flamel didn’t want to use the land for himself, and his wife Perenelle suggested that they create a place where witches and wizards could stay where muggles wouldn’t bother them. Centuries later, it still stands, is bigger and continually growing, and it houses several wizarding families.”

“Wow” Harry said with a smile.

“Yeah, your boyfriend had the same reaction the first time we brought him here too” Jess said with a smile of her own.

“Well it is a magical place” Harry said with a smirk, making Jess roll her eyes. “I guess we should go buy the gifts for Joseph’s parents.”

“Don’t worry, if you and Joseph don’t have anything planned tomorrow, I’m sure he’ll be glad to show you around” Jess said, and Harry nodded with a smile.

They walked around and headed into the bookshop. Jess did the talking, asking for a book on healing magic or potions. The shopkeeper suggested a book on potion ingredients found in North America, and Harry bought it. They then headed for the florist, where Harry got a bouquet of blue and white flowers.

“We still have some time left before Joseph expects us back” Jess said. “We can explore a bit if
“I’d like to, but I just have a feeling that I’m missing something” Harry said, his eyes widening in realisation when they passed a clothes shop. “What am I going to wear? I can’t wear my normal, casual clothes.”

“Why not?” Jess said. “I mean, yeah Joseph’s family grew up in upper class society, but they don’t really care about that stuff that much. As long as you don’t show up naked, I’m sure you’ll be fine.”

“Still, I should look more than just ok” Harry said. “Joseph means a lot to me, and I wanna make a good impression on his parents.”

“Well, then you’ve got just the right person to help you” The blonde witch said with a smile.

They headed for the park and apparated to Paris, walking a few blocks and into the clothing store Jess bought most of Louis’s clothes.

“Alright, you just sit here while I pick out an outfit for you” Jess said, gesturing to the couches.

“Thanks, and sorry for this” Harry said. “My sense of style is extremely limited.”

“It’s no trouble, and I’ve had a lot of practice since I started dating Louis” Jess said. “I mean, I love him, but his closet would be filled with nothing but plaid shirts and three pairs of the same jeans if I didn’t help him.”

Harry sat on a couch and watched as Jess quickly and easily move around the store. A couple minutes later, she returned with her arms full of stuff, which she immediately handed to Harry and shooed him into a fitting room. She had gotten Harry a dark green dress shirt, a pair of light khakis, a dark brown belt, a pair of light brown loafers and a black sports coat. While Harry didn’t think he was an extremely attractive person, even he admitted he looked good as he stared at the mirror.

“Looking good” Jess said with a smile when Harry exited the dressing room.
“Thanks, but you did all the work” Harry said. “Now if I can only fix this hair.”

“Ah yes, the famous untamable hair of Harry Potter” Jess said with a smirk.

“You know about it?” Harry asked.

“Only when Joseph talked about you, which was constantly for the first year” Jess said with a smile and Harry blushed. “There are some hair products of mine that you can use. But for the record, Joseph said he likes your hair.”

“He does?” Harry asked in disbelief.

“Yup” Jess answered with a nod. “In fact, his exact words were ‘I love Harry’s hair. It gives him a look that says ‘I just had the most amazing shag of my life.’”

“There’s no way Joseph said that” Harry stated, and while he believed his boyfriend wouldn’t use such crass language, the idea made him smile widely.

“That’s what he said when I told him it happened” Jess said as Harry reentered the dressing room to change back into his own clothes. “He was drunk when he said it, but I’m sure he’s remembered it now.”

“You got my boyfriend drunk?” Harry asked when he got out of the dressing room again.

“It didn’t take much. The love of your life is a lightweight” Jess replied with a chuckle.

“Did he spill any secrets?” Harry asked.

“We haven’t gotten him to that stage of drunkenness” Jess said. “When Joseph drinks, he has several stages; Tipsy, he’s chattier than normal. First stage is he’s even chattier and he’s constantly switching topics, and there are no limitations to what he’ll talk about. One night, he started talking about the ban on some flowers because they can be used to make poisons and how being able to study them would allow people to make antidote and the next thing I know, he starts talking about bees. Not as an ingredient, just bees as a general topic. It went on for half an hour cause Louis and Anna were as smashed as he was.”
“It may come as a shock to you, but I don’t find that surprising at all” Harry said with a chuckle. “What are the next stages?”

“The second stage is when he becomes overly interested in our personal lives; asking about relationships, families, etc. It’s quite a strange sight to be honest” Jess said, and Harry smiled. “Third stage is when he gets moody, and starts talking about missing you, or his friends, or English weather while complaining about how bright it is here.”

“But since I’m here now, he’ll mostly be talking about the latter two more” Harry said.

“Or he could replace it and start talking about wishing he lived in a cave” Jess returned with a smirk. “Anyway, the fourth stage is when he starts to get slightly crazy, doing things you’d imagine him doing only if he was being coerced or he made a very stupid bet.”

“Meaning singing all Celina Warbeck songs?” Harry asked with a knowing smile. “What’s the stage after that?”

“We don’t know” Jess replied. “Since the Celina Warbeck incident, Joseph’s been very careful about not getting too drunk. The farthest we’ve gotten him is stage three.”

“Well, with me here we might get past stage four” Harry said.

“I knew there was someone mischievous under that serious auror” Jess said with a smile, conversing with the shopkeepers when they got to the check-out counter.

“How much is everything?” Harry asked, and he was about to bring out his wallet when Jess stopped him.

“Don’t worry Harry, it’s on me” Jess said with a smile, handing one of the shopkeepers a credit card.

“You don’t have to do that” Harry said. “And we just met.”
“I don’t have to, but I want to” Jess simply replied as she signed her signature on the receipt. “And even though we just met, I feel like I’ve known you for years because Joseph has been talking about you for years.”

“Still, it’d be rude of me to have you spend so much money on me” Harry said after he thanked the shopkeepers and followed Jess outside.

“Then don’t think of it as me spending a lot of money on you” Jess said. “Think of it as a thank you gift.”

“A thank you gift? For what?” Harry asked.

“While Joseph and I may lock horns at least once a day, we care for each other a lot, and while you’ve seen him smile in several pictures that I took over the past decade, he was never truly happy” Jess said. “He’d put on a smile for our friends and his parents as a courtesy or to not make them worry, but he was unhappy. A lot of things contributed to it; abandoning his home, not being able to leave the house under the Fidelius charm or the Beauxbatons school grounds, not knowing how his friends are doing, and a lot more other stuff. But the biggest reason was you. I’m sure you covered it at great length the first night you were here, but I’m sure Joseph neglected to tell you that there were so many time he had thought you moved on.”

“He didn’t” Harry said in shock. “I mean, I kinda had the same thoughts, but why did he?”

“He thought that you had found someone better suited for you and that he wouldn’t be able to help you as much since he wasn’t in the war” Jess replied. “So when Draco sent him that copy of the Daily Prophet with you talking about devoting the past decade of your life capturing Death Eaters just so he could be safe, he was beaming.” Harry gave Jess a skeptical look. “Well, he wasn’t beaming, but he whistled while he cooked. And he was happier in the first hour you two were together since he fled England than the past five years he was here. So the clothes are a gift to say thank you for not giving up on him, and thank you also for making him so happy.”

Harry smiled and the two shared a tight hug. The two then continued talking about the drunken antics they’ve both gotten into until they arrived back at the flat. As Harry walked into the flat, Joseph walked out of his bedroom, and Harry felt so much happiness and love at seeing the taller raven, he walked up to him, wrapped his arms around his neck and pulled him in for a deep kiss.

“What was that for?” Joseph asked when they parted slowly.
“Nothing” Harry said with a smile. “And Jess may have spilled the beans on what you’ve been saying about me when you’ve had a little too much to drink.”

“She should be careful. I might tell Louis what she gets up to when she has too much to drink” Joseph said loudly so his friend could hear him. “And what did you buy while you were out?”

“Well, the flowers are for your mom, and the book is for your dad” Harry said as he showed Joseph. “And this is the outfit I’m going to wear tonight.”

“They’ll love these, but you didn’t have to buy a whole new outfit” Joseph said. “They’ll love you as long as you’ll be yourself. That’s all you had to do with me.”

“I’ll still be me, just in nicer clothes” Harry said, pecking his boyfriend’s cheek.

Joseph nodded and moved to finish getting dressed while Harry went to take a shower. Minutes later, Harry stared at himself in the mirror in Joseph’s room, in the outfit that Jess got him earlier, and having used some of the products the blonde witch recommended for his hair. Taking a deep breath, he walked out into the lounge, where Joseph, Jess and Louis were talking, nervous about what his boyfriend would say. When the Slytherin looked at him, he didn’t say anything but it was a good thing, since the Slytherin mouth had dropped, his eyes widened, and he was shamelessly looking Harry up and down.

“Harry…” Joseph began as he approached the Gryffindor. “You look amazing.”

“Thanks, but I can’t take all the credit” Harry said. “Jess helped me pick out the outfit.”

“I told you you looked great” Jess said. “I feel like a mom whose son is about to attend his first dance.”

“Well, you guys have fun tonight” Louis said as he and Jess said goodbye before heading out to the cinema.

“You really do look great” Joseph said as he gently took Harry’s hand. “I love the colour green on you.”
“Because it helps you better imagine that I’m a Slytherin?” Harry asked with a smile as he looked up at Joseph.

“Well, there’s that. But mostly because it makes your eyes pop” Joseph said, using his free hand to cup Harry’s cheek gently. “You’re absolutely gorgeous.”

“You’re gorgeous too” Harry said, his cheeks rapidly turning pink and his smile widening with each second.

The two shared a short, but sweet kiss before they slightly parted, pressing their foreheads against each other, green eyes staring into amber ones. They stayed like that for a few minutes until the sound of the clock in the lounge chiming six times brought them out of the trance they were in.

“Ready?” Joseph asked after he had retrieved the food from the kitchen, and Harry had gathered the gifts.

“Let’s go have you introduce me to my future in-laws.”
Chapter 14

Apparating was still Harry’s least favorite mode of travel, as he never felt quite right upon landing, but Joseph said it would be better to walk up to the doorway than to pop through the Floo. Besides, his parents had several protections over the Floo as a precaution. They still didn’t trust the world around them, and Harry really didn’t blame them. He believed that Joseph handled the situation better because he has been living in the muggle world for years now.

Once Harry was able to get his bearings together, he finally had a good look at his surroundings; the building in front of them was a two-storey château, the outer walls were painted white and the roof tiles were a bluish-grey. The building in the centre was surrounded by gardens with dozens of flowers in bloom. Joseph took out his wand, casted a quick spell on the wrought iron gate, and took Harry’s hand when it opened, making the Gryffindor smile.

“The place is beautiful, you know,” Harry whispered as they walked along the brick pathway to the front door.

“Did you expect anything less?” Joseph asked with a smirk.

“Of course not,” Harry said. “Still, I think it’s important to note.”

“Let’s not talk about this place, though” Joseph said. “This place may be big and beautiful, but it was like a prison, a gilded cage. I had it easier since I stayed here during the summer and Beauxbatons during the school year while finishing my studies.”

Harry felt Joseph hold his hand a little tighter. Harry squeezed his hand back comfortingly, and the taller raven smiled at him. Joseph knocked when they got to the front door, and they were greeted by a house elf. Joseph brought out two dishes from his pocket and unshrunk them before handing them to the house elf. Harry wondered why Joseph brought two dishes. As he recalled, they had only bought enough stuff for one. He thought, perhaps, that the second dish was a dessert, and that his boyfriend bought it while he and Jess were out. Harry didn’t really have time to think about it because they entered the lounge, and there were Joseph’s parents.

“Harry, it’s my pleasure to finally introduce you to my parents” Joseph said. “This is my mother, Alyssa, and my father, Stephen.”

“It’s a pleasure to meet you both” Harry said with a smile, stepping forward and offering his hand.

“The pleasure is all ours, Mr. Potter” Stephen said as he and Harry shared a firm handshake.

“Thank you for having me over on such short notice” Harry said, taking Alyssa’s hand and giving it a quick kiss.

“You’re welcome in our home anytime, dear” Alyssa said with an approving nod. “Besides, it’s glad to finally meet the person our son feels so strongly about.”
“Thank you” Harry said with a blush. “I also have something for you.”

“Thank you, Harry” Alyssa said as she admired the bouquet of blue and white flowers. “These are beautiful.”

“Thank you also for this” Stephen said. “I’ve been meaning to start researching on potions and ingredients from different parts of the world.”

As Alyssa went to put the flowers in a vase and Stephen moved to place his new book on the shelf, Harry moved closer to Joseph.

“Am I doing alright?” Harry asked Joseph nervously.

“You’re doing perfectly, love” Joseph said with a smile, and Harry smiled back.

Joseph’s parents returned and had each taken to their typical chairs, leaving Harry and Joseph to sit across from them on the loveseat.

“So Harry, how are things back in England?” Alyssa asked. “I get updates when my friends write to me, but they only usually talk about themselves.”

“Well, Kingsley has been doing great as the minister” Harry replied. “A lot of the damage has been repaired, and they have been funding plenty of programs to help those gravely affected by the war.”

“Yes, I’ve heard nothing but praise for Kingsley from my colleagues” Stephen said.

“And Lady Narcissa’s charity is doing extremely well” Joseph said, before turning to Harry. “A big reason being you.”

“Well, I’m not the only reason. Mrs. Malfoy has put in a lot of hard work and dedication into it” Harry said. “She’s providing shelter, food, and clothes to orphans, as well as finding them good homes.”

“Yes, after the final battle, she wrote to me about how distraught she was at seeing the many students who lost their lives or their parents” Alyssa said.

“We were saddened by the news, as well at the fact that we couldn’t do anything to help” Stephen added.

“You shouldn’t be. There were huge targets on your backs” Harry said. “And I apologise for that.”

“Harry…” Joseph began, but Harry shook his head.

“It’s my fault that you all had to flee the country” Harry said. “It’s also my fault that the manor you, and several generations of your family, was burned down. It’s my fault that you had to be trapped here for ten years. I’m very sorry about everything.”

“Well, from our perspective Harry, you’re not the one at fault” Stephen said, surprising the Gryffindor. “Our home being burned down, being trapped here and us having to flee all leads back to Voldemort. If fault were to be placed on anyone in this room, it would be on Joseph.”

“Indeed. Our instructions to him were to keep a low-profile, help his friends, and try to make him look more valuable off the field rather than on it.” Alyssa added. “He followed our instructions until he met and fell in love with you. The only question is if he regrets acting on his feelings.”
“Well...do you?” Harry asked as he slowly looked up at the raven beside him.

“No” Joseph immediately replied before pressing a kiss on Harry’s forehead.

The kiss was short, but it made a wave of relief wash over Harry. Up until this moment, he thought that Joseph’s parents hated him. He even thought a part of Joseph hated him for what his family had to go through, but they didn’t.

"Now that that’s settled, shall we eat?” Alyssa suggested and the boys followed her to the dining room.

The two couples sat across from each other, with Harry facing Stephen, and Joseph facing his mother. Dinner started with some artichokes with hollandaise sauce, which was followed by the dish that Joseph made; duck confit. While conversation was limited to talking about how things were back in England and how Joseph’s parents were enjoying France, as the meal progressed and everyone ate the delicious food that had been prepared, talking became easier and more relaxed. By the end of the main course, Harry and Stephen were talking about the Quidditch teams they were rooting for.

"I would have never pegged you for a Falmouth Falcons fan" Harry said.

"Stephen's been obsessed with that team since we were in Hogwarts" Alyssa stated.

"I thought you always bet on Puddlemere United for the St. Mungo's Quidditch pool?” Joseph asked.

"Of course majority of people will bet on PU when something's at stake. It's the smart and safe choice" Stephen explained. "But I will always be a Falcons fan."

"I get that" Harry said with a nod. "I'm usually torn between Puddlemere and the Harpies."

"Men are all the same" Joseph said as he rolled his eyes when Harry and his father began discussing the teams they wanted to be in the World Cup Final.

"When they say they're different from everyone else, they just mean ten to fifteen percent” Alyssa remarked before taking a sip of wine. "I think we should have dessert now."

The house elf cleared the plates and cutlery, replacing them immediately and in between them all was a dessert that Harry was very familiar with.

"I'm surprised you chose to make an English dessert when all the other dishes were French" His mother stated.

"Well, it's a special occasion" Joseph said. "Today's the day you and father were going to meet Harry, and Treacle tart is his favourite."

Joseph cut a slice each for his parents first, then a single slice for him and Harry. The taller raven handed Harry a dessert fork, offering the slice for him to try first. Harry took the tip off the slice and as he ate it, he made a pleased sound.

"It's absolutely delicious" Harry said with a smile. "Thank you for making this for me."

Joseph smiled back and gave Harry a peck on the cheek before the four returned to conversing over dessert. Once all of them had eaten their fill, they returned to the lounge, where they were served tea or coffee.
"So, what are the else do you have planned before Harry returns to England?" Alyssa asked.

"Well, Harry wants to explore the Ville de Flamel, so we're going tomorrow" Joseph replied. "The day after is his last day here before he returns home, so we'll spend it doing whatever we both want to do. And next week, I'll be visiting England for Blaise's birthday."

"So, have you made a decision?" Stephen asked his son. "On whether to return to England or not?"

"No I haven't" Joseph said with a sigh.

"Well, you'll need to make a decision soon" Alyssa stated.

"Why the sudden urgency?" Harry asked.

"Since we fled years ago, we've been living here under the protection of the French Ministry" Alyssa explained. "It's been a decade since then and while we may hold England dear in our hearts, we might want to officially be French citizens."

"Joseph has made friends here, graduated from Beauxbatons, and has a career here" Stephen added. "Even his mother and I, while we were only confined here and left when Alyssa's friend from the French ministry and a dozen aurors were with us, we still made a life here."

"Wait, so you guys are staying?" Harry asked Joseph's parents, who nodded.

"Stephen will be starting an independent clinic with five other healers he's made friends with over the years, and my friend has promised to find me a position in the ministry if I want one" Alyssa said. "But to be honest, I've grown tired of politics. I think I might apply to be a teacher at Beauxbatons."

"Well, father does keep saying I got my skill for Potions from him, and skill for Charms from you" Joseph said, and turned to see Harry looking up at him. "I haven't decided where to live, Harry."

"But you do have friends, family and a career here" Harry stated. "I can't imagine all of those things are easy to leave behind."

"Those aren't issues. I have friends back in England, and Draco and Theo have offered me a job at their apothecary, should I return and need it" Joseph replied. "As for my parents and friends here, I can easily visit them."

"Well, where would you like to live, Harry?" Alyssa asked. "I assume where you both want to live should be taken into consideration."

"While England is where most of the people I love live, I couldn't care less where Joseph and I are as long as we're together" Harry said, making Stephen nod and Alyssa form a small smile. "I've spent that last ten years apart from him, and I don't ever want to be separated again."

The four agreed to let the topic rest and as it was getting late, Joseph and Harry decided to head back to Joseph's flat. They said goodnight to the taller raven's parents before heading out of the house, and apparating to an alleyway close to Joseph's building.

"So, do you think I did well?" Harry asked as they were getting ready for bed in Joseph's room

"Are you kidding?" Joseph asked. "You got my mom to give a genuine smile. Not even Draco has done that."
"It isn't the first time I've beaten him at something" Harry said with a smirk.

"Don't get cocky" Joseph said as they lay down in bed.

"Like this is the first time you've seen an arrogant Gryffindor" Harry said, pecking Joseph's cheek. "And it's not like an arrogant Slytherin is better."

"An arrogant Slytherin still weighs the risks of an action, but will take it even though odds are stacked against them" Joseph returned. "An arrogant Gryffindor will jump into something head first, risks be damned."

"Shouldn't you support Gryffindor now since we're together again?" Harry asked with a pout.

"I love you, not your house" Joseph said, pecking the shorter raven's nose.

"Maybe I can sway you" Harry said with a mischievous grin. "Like with threatening to show everyone back in England that picture of you in the Beauxbatons uniform."

"Show that picture to anyone, and I will make facing a Hungarian Horntail preferable" Joseph threatened.

Harry chuckled, giving Joseph a peck on the lips before burying his face in the crook of the Slytherin's neck. He was extremely happy, but something bugged him; the decision Joseph had to make. While he completely meant it when he said it didn't matter to him where he and Joseph lived, he had worries should Joseph choose to live in France. He doubts he'd be able to go a week without talking with Ron and Hermione, and Molly and Arthur took care of him like their own. There were his friends who he met up with to play a friendly match of Quidditch or football, or just to talk and hang out with. Then there was Teddy. Andromeda absolutely loved her grandson, but she's just getting too old to keep up with him. And the young metamorphagus has Marauder blood in him, and he's been causing trouble since he could start walking.

"You're worried about my decision, aren't you?" Joseph suddenly asked.

"How?" Harry asked with a mixed expression of confusion and awe.

"I'm not sure, I just had a feeling" Joseph said, running his hand up and down Harry's back gently. "So, what's up?"

"Well, while I'd be fine with you choosing to live in France, I'm just having hard time thinking about what life would be like not seeing Ron, Hermione and everyone else as much as I'm used to" Harry replied. "And there's Teddy. I'm not sure Andromeda will be able to keep up with him as he gets older, and starts making more trouble."

"I'm sure it doesn't help that you're his godfather, someone who's broken school rules since first getting to Hogwarts" Joseph said with a smirk before hugging the Gryffindor tightly. "Look, I don't know what I'll end up choosing, but I agree with everything you said earlier tonight."

"Really?" Harry asked, looking up into Joseph's amber eyes.

"Whether we need to make arrangements so we can see your friends and family or mine, we'll make it work" Joseph replied. "I love you Harry James Potter."

"I love you too Joseph Duskgem" Harry returned with a huge smile. "Wherever you choose to go, you can be assured I'll be right next to you."
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