Lost in Reminiscence

by like_the_First_Snow

Summary

Things honestly couldn’t get worse for Harry; he was presently stuck half a century in the past, possibly forever, having permanent sleepover arrangements with baby Death Eaters and the teenaged Dark Lord himself!
He would rather face off Voldemort in a very unfair (as they often were) battle—in the graveyard, in the Ministry, anywhere with an open field, where he’d be fighting with his very life on the line—than sleeping in the same room as Tom bloody Riddle… that was just too wrong…
This was a nightmare.
Greetings, lovely humans :) 

I honestly can't tell you how excited I am, this is my very FIRST fanfiction! 

I started writing this on pure whim, I had an idea stuck my mind and there was just this really strong itch to write it down (after all, I do have an unhealthy obsession over this pairing), and voilà ! here it is... 

Keep in mind that my writing, in terms of style, is still in its early stages. As it is still in the active process of development, it is highly subject to changes throughout the story, as I am currently discovering my style, pace, and the boundaries of the world of writing, so please bear with me for now :D 

(Hopefully my horrid summaries will also improve with time...) 

See the end of the chapter for more notes 

His skin was prickly. His breathing became shallow and quick paced. His entire body was slump and heavy, like a hundred bricks had dropped over him. The air became heavy, thick with ancient magic and swirled uncontrollably until everything around was reduced to a blur of color gradients. Harry found himself spinning and spinning—reminding him of those defective portkeys—so fast he found himself up in the air, and for a moment Harry thought he was flying. The next thing he knew was that a hard surface slammed against his body. 

Pain. *Exploding* pain, tingling, and burning along his lower back, as if his skin caught fire. Harry groaned. The fall was brutal, and his poor bum had taken full impact as he crashed into the rock-hard floor. 

His eyes blinked rapidly, squinting to make out blurred outlines of his surroundings. 


The hollow shapes and low shadows suggested one of Hogwarts’ more obscure hallways. 

Harry frowned. Wasn’t apparition, or any alternative forms of teleportation warded against in Hogwarts? 

Just a moment ago, Harry had been in Dumbledore’s Office. 

Their ‘private lessons’, or so Dumbledore had called them, had increased in frequency and duration over the past weeks, and Harry found himself delving deeper and deeper into the twisted past of a young Dark Lord in in the making. 

If there was one thing Harry had learned from the Pensieve memories, it was Riddle’s pure genius for manipulation. It was creepy and repulsing, of course, but at the same time, Harry couldn’t bring himself to look away… 

Riddle was simply *brilliant* in his acting, in the way he drew you in, intense and enticing and
almost intimate, luring his victims in so close they lost themselves amidst the attention. Harry was sure they had felt like the most special person in the world, when in reality, Riddle was only securing the strings to their newfound master-puppet relationship. Again, creepy.

Harry remembered Riddle was engaging in the forbidden subject of -what was it called? – ah, Horcruxes, before everything around became blurry and fuzzy and weird. The last thing he heard was Slughorn’s infuriated voice hovering above hazy images, shouting rather indistinctively, and that was when a mysterious force pulled Harry out of the Pensieve and threw him here—wherever this was.

Harry was suddenly pulled out of his train of thoughts when an authoritative cough voiced right behind him. Real close. And Harry was suddenly aware that he was sitting on his bum, legs spread out in an unmanly fashion. In the middle of a hallway.

Crap!

Heat shot to his cheeks, and Harry spluttered, “I—my bad!”

A firm hand, which Harry hadn’t noticed before, squeezed his shoulder, a fraction too tight, and he realized it had been the source of his support system all this time preventing him from collapsing like a pile of goo. It was a large hand connected to a toned arm, belonging to a boy towering over Harry’s sitting form, bent down in a seemingly concerned position. There was a sudden rush of fresh mint, and Harry realized just how close they were.

“No worries,” the silky voice drawled, sounding strangely familiar, and Harry wondered where he had heard it from. “Now, let’s get you up,”

With the unknown boy’s assistance, Harry was promptly brought up to his feet. Harry briefly smothered down his wild hair and wrinkled shirt and proceeded to studying his ah, helper.

Dark hazel eyes, lustrous black hair, smooth ivory skin, teasing soft lips, deadly handsome features… This was all starting to sound real familiar…

Harry found himself gawking at the tall figure in front him, disbelieving what he was seeing.

No, no, no, this was not happening! Anything but this!

But there stood Tom Riddle, charismatic and powerful as Harry had remembered him, not a day older than his diary form.

This was a joke, right? This couldn’t be—this did not make sense. Tom Riddle was all about the past and only existed as a soulless figure in the Pensieve! Then how in Merlin’s beard did Tom acquire a solid body?

Harry was currently glaring at the other’s face, wishing that the intensity of his stare would shoot lasers out of his eyes and kill Riddle on the spot. Hazel eyes studied his face in return with unconcealed surprised, quickly replaced by a dangerous glint flashing through those dark orbs. Was Riddle going to attack him? Harry was not going down without a fight!

Harry’s right hand lunged for his wand, which resided in his right pocket, but Riddle was quicker. With a snap of his long fingers, Harry’s wand flew out of his robes right into Tom’s waiting hand.

“I don’t think so,” Riddle murmured, his sweetened voice rung in Harry’s ears excruciatingly, filled with mockery as he twirled Harry’s wand around his fingers playfully. “It would not be in your best interest to attack me,”
Great, Harry found himself wandless and at the mercy of a teenaged Voldemort. It was like the Chamber of Secrets all over again!

Harry spat the nastiest curse he knew (from Fred and George’s elaborate vocabulary, to be precise).

“Oh, not very friendly,” Riddle didn’t seem bothered by Harry’s rude language. In fact, he only appeared more intrigued, dark eyes grazing over Harry with a strange gleam in them. “What is your business here?”

“I think that’s quite obvious, I’m a student here!” Harry said exasperatedly, before quickly adding. “I should be asking you the same.”

“Then I believe my business is quite obvious as well,” Riddle said smoothly, eyeing Harry with a skeptical expression, as if Harry was the one being ridiculous here!

“But really,” retorted Harry, narrowing his eyes. “What are you planning?”

“Hm,” Riddle playfully tilted his head to the side, as if considering his choices. “I’m planning on helping a boy who has suddenly appeared in the middle of the hallway, who seems rather lost, might I add.” Riddle’s face edged uncomfortably close, so close Harry could feel the other’s breath caress his cheeks. The aroma of fresh mint was thicker than ever. “Tell me, do I know you?”

Harry opened his mouth, preparing for a quick comeback, only to shut it a second later. He blinked for several moments, taking in the implications of the question before sick realization sunk in…

Oh.

At first it had sounded completely mental, but the more he thought of it, the more it made sense…

The Pensieve, Slughorn’s memory, the magic fluke… Tom Riddle… it all played into harmony. It seemed that Harry was trapped inside a Pensieve memory!

And that in itself wasn’t that bad. Obviously, magic defects happen all the time in the wizarding world, right? Even with Dumbledore’s vast knowledge and overall genius, sometimes, the inevitable was inevitable.

What Harry couldn’t explain, however, was the fact that he was participating in its dynamics, which was rather alarming because memories were fixed fragments of the past and should remain unchanged by any form of future meddling, right?

And even worse was that he was stuck with Tom bloody Riddle, the very last person he’d like to run into in these circumstances! Or any circumstance at that!

Harry wanted to laugh at this joke of a situation.

“Well?” came a smooth voice, now edging closer to impatience.

“Give. It. Back.” Harry growled, stretching his hand out in anticipation, toward his wand, which rested idly between Riddle’s long fingers.

“Not until you answer my question,” Riddle murmured, and Harry knew very well that the soft edge to his tone did not shroud the underlying threat. Harry remembered that Voldemort scarcely
raised his voice to make his point clear, his ominous presence alone was enough to make a statement. “Let me repeat myself, who are you?”

“I’m nobody, no one that should interest you.”

“Nonsense,” Riddle replied gently and flashed a compassionate smile, if Harry hadn’t known better he would fallen for it too. Ugh. “I think I should have a say in that, don’t you think? And to do so, I will first need a name.”

Harry couldn’t believe this. He couldn’t believe this was actually happening.

“This is ridiculous,” Harry snapped, bursting with so many emotions at once that he felt dizzy, barely keeping track of what he was saying. “You see, I happen to be in a hurry and speaking to you is a waste of my time! Now, I’d appreciate if you give me my wand back!”

There was a weird smile curling the edge of Riddle’s lips, before he tucked his wand back into Harry’s pocket neatly and withdrew a step back, quite to Harry’s surprise.

For a moment, Riddle appeared mildly affronted by Harry’s rather rude demeanor, before his expression shifted, the tension at his jaw dropped, his chocolate brown eyes now soft, more tender than Harry had ever seen… almost hurt?

“I think you are misunderstanding my motives,” he spoke softly. “I was just trying to aid a fellow student in trouble. I thought that perhaps making your acquaintance would be helpful should a similar incident occur in the near future. I’m just looking for a name, for what I believe is a good cause. Is that too much to ask for?” he looked at Harry with an expectant expression.

Riddle had never looked more human and Harry reminded himself that this was not Voldemort.

Not yet.

This boy had yet to commit a fraction of the crimes that Harry had held him in account for. While he was hardly the most innocent person alive, he was still a teenager, who, like countless others, had no idea what the future had in store for him, and maybe, just for once, Riddle was looking out for other students?

After all, Riddle had been the one to help him up.

And admittedly, the other had every opportunity to attack Harry. Yet, he didn’t. It was like the other was almost… agreeable.

Harry found himself sticking out his hand. “Fair enough, you can call me Harry.”

Riddle was not one to let opportunities slide, as he instantly took Harry’s offered hand. Cool fingers curled around Harry’s hand, eliciting shivers that travelled down to his very bones. Harry noted that those dark piercing eyes never left him, and upon closer inspection there was triumphant gleam in them.

Emotional manipulation, Harry realized, a second too late. Who was he fooling? There was nothing friendly, nothing kind in the way Riddle ‘helped’ him. Harry played right into his trap, like a fool!

“It’s a pleasure to meet you, Harry.” Riddle rolled Harry’s name in contemplation of the foreign sound on his tongue. It was also an emphasis on the blatant lack of surname and a taunting reminder of Riddle’s generous decision not to pry into it. All this without being explicitly ominous. Bloody Hell.
“I’m Tom Riddle.” A gentle smile graced Riddle’s features, and Harry was horrified by how genuinely kind the other appeared. “I am Slytherin Prefect, feel welcome to come to me in times of need. I always offer a helping hand to my friends.”

Bullshit.

“Brilliant,” Harry slipped his fingers out of the handshake with the speed of light. Riddle looked mildly amused.

It took every ounce of Harry’s will power not to just lunge at the other’s throat and wipe that smug expression off of the bastard’s face!

But that could wait.

Really, anyone could tell playing mind games with a curious baby Dark Lord screamed danger. For now, Harry needed a way out. He needed to find Dumbledore, who would be as insightful (and vague) as he was in the real world and provide an explanation of what the bloody hell was going on.

“Looks like I’ll have to take advantage of that already.” Harry stated flatly, indeed using Riddle’s offered help while simultaneously taunting him with the name he knew he detested. A definite win. “Do you know where I can find Dumbledore?”

“You mean, Professor Dumbledore,” Riddle corrected sharply.

Blimey. Harry wasn’t being as careful as he’d thought around the Slytherin heir. “Yes, Professor Dumbledore.” He repeated. Lamely.

“I believe Professor Dumbledore was on his way to his office,” Riddle’s voice was suspiciously neutral. “You’ll find the Transfiguration Office is two staircases up, on the 4th floor, to your right.”

“Great,” Harry said, through gritted teeth. Not in a million years was he going to thank the man who would grow up to kill his parents. “I’ll get going then.”

Harry spun around, not waiting for Riddle to respond, and broke into a light sprint. He did not want to venture another interaction with the Slytherin. Not when Harry hadn’t a clue what was going on!

“I’ll see you around, Harry.”

The velvety voice came out as a soft murmur, barely audible, yet it followed him, echoing in the back of his mind in a constant repeat, domineering and promising.

Harry leaned against the broad, wooden door to the Transfiguration Office, tapping his foot absently at the floor as he waited for Dumbledore to pop up anytime.

His thoughts naturally drifted to Riddle… he couldn’t help it—the other was insufferable!

In all honesty, he couldn’t believe he had just talked to Riddle (in an arguably diplomatic manner) without cursing the other into bits! He hated every second of their brief interaction, he could not stand the other, it was nearly impossible to breathe back there!
Just how did Riddle manage to get away with everything he’d done? He was so obviously a git, a maniac manipulator rotten to the core, the very embodiment of pure evil!

An image of Riddle instantly formed in his head, this time wearing the sweet, angelic smile straight out of Slughorn’s memory. The answer was there.

Soft brown eyes, perfect skin, perfect brows, perfect hair, and the list could go on… hell, Riddle even smelled good—okay, Harry was going to obliviate himself—and Harry hated every single part of it! He wanted to tear apart the perfect image that was Tom Riddle, burn it to crisps and throw them down to Hell, where Riddle truly belonged!

Admittedly, Harry could have killed him on the spot. Nothing stopped him, and he had every reason to do so. And maybe he should have, but for once, Harry thought he’d opt for a more… rational approach.

A very Hermione-like voice invaded his thoughts.

There was no telling what would happen to the real world. Say, in the worst case scenario, where this Pensieve world had an impact in the real one, then Harry’ killing Riddle off could completely disrupt the universe as Harry had known it, and Harry wasn’t quite sure if it would be for the best…

Approaching footsteps interrupted Harry’s train of thoughts, echoing from the other end of the corridor, trailing two very distinct voices.

“Dark forces have expanded, and penetrated Britain.” I was an older man, who Harry recognized immediately as Headmaster Dippet. “Albus, I can only hope that these walls will stand strong when the war comes.”

“Don’t you worry, my friend. There is no safer place than Hogwarts.”

“That’s—I certainly do not doubt your words, Albus, but have you read about the horrid attacks on the British wizarding villages? He is completely ruthless! Now, we all know your… complicated past with the Dark Lord, and we were all wondering if you’d like to confront him, knock some sense into him before things get too out of hand.”

“Grindelwald is a cunning man, but his methods are predictable. He would not breach too deep into Britain without seeking me out. For now, let us watch how things unfold and prepare ourselves for when the time comes.”

Grindelwald? Of course, Grindelwald the Dark Lord who had risen before Voldemort!

Just how bad was Harry’s luck? Of all places, he had to land in the middle of a wizarding war, with two Dark Lords (as far as baby Dark Lordship was concerned) running on the loose!

“When the time comes,” repeated the other man, sounding somewhat even more horrified.

The two figures came into view, still engaged in their heated discussion of the previous edition of Dark Lordship, though it was mostly Dippet’s one sided coaxing Dumbledore.

Harry cleared his throat to catch the duo’s attention.

“Can I help you, young man?” Whoa. Dumbledore was young. Flaming red hair, blue twinkly eyes and for once, relatively normal clothes. Harry had seen Dumbledore’s younger form in the memories but talking to him like this was an entirely different thing.
“Yes,” Harry admitted. “Professor, I have a very serious problem.”

“Let us have a chat in my office.” Dumbledore made a gesture with his arm, and the door swung open to a spacey room.

One would consider the office a mess, with the sheer number of paperwork lying about, and the eccentric artefacts scattered around the room, but Harry knew that amidst the disarray, Dumbledore found order and peace of the mind.

The sight of Dumbledore’s twinkly blue eyes brought a rush of reassurance, and he suddenly wanted to just spill everything to him. But Harry was quick to restrain himself, he did not want to come off as mental enough to be sent to the asylum.

He suddenly thought of Hermione, who would have dealt with this a million times better than Harry did. She would start off with a safer subject and bring up the issue slowly, gradually, in a controlled and logical manner, which was definitely not what Harry had at the tip of his tongue.

“Er, I think I’m experiencing a technical problem—”

Luckily, Dumbledore cut him off before he could finish. “Do I know you, my boy? You don’t seem familiar to me, despite what your school uniform might suggest.”

“No, Professor.” Harry answered, before correcting himself. “I mean yes, but not yet.”

Blue eyes twinkled in curiosity. “Would you care to elaborate, Mister…?”

“Potter. Harry Potter.” Harry ignored the incredulous expression Dippet was throwing in his direction. “Professor, I think I’m stuck inside a Pensieve memory.”

Harry explained that he was viewing old memories of a professor to gather useful information against the present Dark Lord, before the liquid reacted strongly against his magic and threw him here.

Harry let Dumbledore perform a few spells on him, presumably to verify the veracity of Harry’s claims, and there was also this curious charm which vibrated pleasantly along his body, it seemed to replenish his previously exhausted magic.

“Time travelling through memories,” Dumbledore interpreted calmly.

Ouch. There goes Harry’s inexplicable hope that this was just a random fluke in Pensieve magic.

In reality, Harry had suspected of his journey to the past. He wasn’t stupid. He knew something went seriously wrong when Tom Riddle touched him, and didn’t recognize Harry, who he would spend nearly two decades obsessing over and thus he concluded this had to do with the grander scale of things.

But still, it didn’t make it any less disappointing and painful… to think that he travelled such a long way from home—half a century—and judging by Dumbledore’s distant expression, it was most probably a one-way trip….

His stomach churned.

He’d be separated from his friends, by the insurmountable distance of time, far away from Hermione, and Ron… god, it hurt.

“What date are you from, Harry?”
December 12th, 1996.”

“Dear Merlin,” Dippet gasped. “And this Dark Lord of yours, are you referring to the Grindelwald?”

“No, Professor. After the defeat of Grindelwald, another powerful Dark Lord will rise.”

Dippet looked scandalized. The future was very dark indeed.

Dumbledore, in contrast to his colleague, remained calm and focused in thought. “Perhaps it is best not to reveal what the future holds,” he remarked, and his gaze was directed at both Dippet and Harry. “After all, we do not want to entangle the fragile thread known as time.”

“Of course,” Dippet agreed quickly.

“Sir, do you reckon there’s a way back?” Harry rushed to ask, panic twisting his lower stomach nauseatingly. His voice was almost pleading. “Am I forever stuck here?”

Dumbledore eyed him kindly and his voice was soft, just above a whisper. “I’m afraid we will have to undergo more research into the matter, before drawing conclusions. Pensieve magic is still not entirely understood, up to this day. Its power to shape intricate details of vague, forgotten memories remains a timeless wonder. What fascinates me is its mystic fluid, neither liquid or gaseous, drifting between past and present and balancing between the world of the conscious and unconscious, as if it has a mind of its own, and your slipping through time only proves its mystery.”

Harry’s heart sank. As much as Dumbledore was trying to insinuate there was hope, it was obviously so scarce. He appreciated the professor’s efforts to lighten him up, but nothing at this point could make him feel better, there was nothing worse than being ripped away from his friends and family.

“May I ask for today’s date? And what will happen to me? I don’t have a place to go to.”

“September 3rd, 1943, a little over 53 years in the past.” Dumbledore informed him. “You must be very confused, my boy. But I must remind you, that help will always be given at Hogwarts to those who ask for it. If you wish, you are welcome to stay here and continue your studies. In the meantime, we will do our best to find a way for you to return home.”

“Yes, I would appreciate that very much, professor, thanks.” Harry smiled weakly.

It was the best course of action, it wasn’t like Harry had any better place to go. He had considered contacting the Ministry, which meant running into the Unspeakables, who had more research experience on the subject of time. But that also meant they would likely close him off to the world and perform experiments on Harry like he was a lab rat.

Yes, staying at Hogwarts was in Harry’s best interest, and it was as close to home as it could get.

Dumbledore nodded approvingly. “You must understand, Harry, that time is a fragile thing, but powerful it is. If manipulated carelessly, it will cause severe and often irreversible consequences.”

Oh yes, Harry knew that from personal experience. He was immediately reminded of his Third year, Hermione’s Time-Turner and the rescue of Buckbeak and—Sirius.

“For instance, we will have to change your name. Potter is an old wizarding surname that will be recognized immediately, which we wouldn’t want, Harry. Do you understand?” Harry nodded.
“Well, do you have a particular name in mind? Something you like, preferably.”

“Hadrian Evans,” Harry suggested promptly. It sounded old fashioned enough, without taking away too much familiarity and there was also his mother’s surname.

“Hadrian Evans,” Dumbledore repeated. Arms linked behind his back, he started pacing about the room, which seemed to give him inspiration. “Homeschooled by his parents until Grindelwald’s recent attack on his village. Now orphaned from the war, Mr. Evans must come to Hogwarts to resume his education. What do you think?”

“It sounds like a very plausible story.” Harry commented.

*And it is somewhat half true.*

“Perfect!” The stars in Dumbledore’s cerulean eyes sparkled, before they dimmed down on a more serious note. “Once again, I cannot stress enough on the importance of sustaining the timeline. I will ask your full cooperation on the discrete nature of your time travelling.”

“Yes, I understand Professor.”

“However, I am well aware that secrets are a heavy burden on the soul. Given that you will be staying here for quite a while and considering the cultural differences… it is not unreasonable that some things… slip through. If such a time is to come, I will entrust your judgment on the matter.”

Even though Harry hadn’t decided to tell a soul—not when bloody Riddle was on the loose—this was a great relief. It was like he escaped from a possible vow of secrecy.

“Now, please excuse me, I will deal with your school supplies and the papers. You’re in your 6th year, am I correct?” Harry nodded. “Good, good, do follow Headmaster Dippet. He will present you to your new classmates and teachers. I will be in touch with you in the following days. Best of luck, Mr. Evans,”

Dumbledore’s retreating back disappeared from sight, leaving Harry alone with his predecessor.

“Now that that has been taken of,” Dippet seemed to have regained his composure, although he was still mildly agitated, and Harry couldn’t blame him. It was not every day you met a time traveler. “Tell me, which House were you in in your time?”

“I am in Gryffindor,” he quickly supplied, and found himself stressing on the present tense.

“That, we will find out tonight.” Dippet winked at Harry. “It is Hogwarts tradition to sort new students in front of the entire school. Even late transfer students are no exception. Surely it wouldn’t hurt to resort yourself. One may consider it a privilege to be sorted twice by our brilliant Sorting Hat!” the previous Headmaster chuckled throatily, excitement evident in his voice.

Harry would soon realize that was the biggest bullshit ever.

“Follow me, we shall head to the Great Hall, where your classmates are dining.” Dippet said, before turning around his heel to lead the way.

Harry glared at the floor.
Terrible, generic, very cliché beginning, sorry ’bout that, hopefully the story will progress toward a more pertinent direction... anyhow, please tell me what you think :3
Chapter Notes

FINALS TOTALLY DESTROYED ME, BUT HERE I AM!
now, on with chapter 2....

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tom was on his way to the Great Hall when a boy landed in the middle of the corridor, seemingly out of thin air.

The boy would have crashed into him, if he hadn’t stepped aside, but Tom was always quick to act.

Tom snapped his eyes to the other, whose form sprawled across on the floor, confused, disoriented.

A 5th year, or 6th year, he couldn’t tell, but he was positive he had never seen him, and Tom remembered every face of every student walking the corridors of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.

A late transfer student was a plausible explanation.

The boy was handsome enough, Tom thought, and his grand entrance had caught him off guard. Otherwise, the other seemed absolutely mediocre, if not outstandingly disoriented, confused and quite honestly, not so bright.

At times like this, Tom wondered if it was in his best interest to keep his perfect role model image. A slip of the persona was very tempting at the moment, but he always knew better. Tom's features slid carefully into pretense kindness, a charming smile playing at his lips as he offered his assistance.

He had expected the boy to squeak an apology out of embarrassment, or, at the other spectrum of things, thank his ‘savior’ with an expression of awe. Both repulsed him.

He was proven wrong.

Tom’s efforts were greeted with something else entirely.

A million emotions warped together, entangled tightly into a thick, dense knot, shrinking—until it burst, shattering, and scattering - directed at Tom.


The boy knew him. Tom had never seen him.

Their conversation proved to be intriguing. Short, and thus even more interesting... it was like words were not enough to express such intense, vivid emotions burning within the boy ... it was exhilarating... yes, there the other was being very confrontational, very accusatory in his claims,
but it was more than that; it was as if Tom had greatly wronged the boy personally, and then there was -

*Those eyes.*

Bright, fiery, emerald orbs dipped in the forbidden essence of the killing curse, they *fluttered*, reminding how very much *alive* they were.

Stunning.

There was also boy’s strange behavior.

While countless others would relish in Tom’s physical proximity, the boy flinched upon contact and squirmed uncomfortably under his touch, yet that handshake was a firm one, determined. Perhaps… a history of abuse? But that seemed unlikely. Victims of abuse never looked so *defiant*, they cowered in fear at the unpleasant memories playing in their head.

This was something entirely new

Tom noted the flight and fight response persisting within the boy's posture; his entire body was tense and stiff, ready to jump should Tom give the false signal. The boy was visibly desperate to escape from Tom, but also eager to strike at him should the opportunity arise. It was an interesting combination, as from Tom’s experience, it was either one or the other. Needless to say, neither got his victims very far.

And the way he had reached for his wand was *oh so* spontaneous. The boy would make a splendid dueler. There was the undeniable element of instinct, but the speed and certainty of his movements could only be driven by experience or perhaps… trauma?

Just *how* was Tom associated with this succession of responses? From a *stranger.*

Which lead back to his original question.

How had Harry known Tom?

Of course, he already had a few leads judging from the boy’s blatant behavior. Tom could always attempt at educated guesses—he was *wondrous* at those, but there was really no concrete, logic-based reasoning for the boy’s demeanor.

Thoughts of the mysterious bright-eyed boy trailed all the way down to the Slytherin table.

“Hey Tom!” the munching face of Mulciber momentarily paused, as he flailed a waving hand in the air. “Over here, we saved you a spot!”

Tom rolled his eyes. Really, there was no need to make such a spectacle. It was an excessively conspicuous gesture with little to no practicality. Tom could see very well with his 20/20 vision, and his seat was always saved in the middle of his snakes anyway.

Tom slipped into his seat and reached for the delicious-smelling ribs without so much a glance at his associates.

“What took you so long?” Edouard Rosier inquired. “You’re usually painfully early for supper.”

“An inconvenience,” was all he offered.

His snakes shifted knowingly, Tom’s distant response was not an invitation for further prying, and
there was a dangerous glow in his dark eyes, which they all knew far too well…

“Is that so,” Edouard Rosier mused. “Anyway, we were just saying; things were getting dull without you and Orion.”

"Hm,”

“Speaking of Orion, where is he?” Avery growled.

"I haven’t seen him since Charms class.” Mulciber said thoughtfully. "I wonder what that bloke's been up t all this time..."

"I’d be surprised if he's not playing Quidditch.” Rosier hummed. "Black seems to be of a different species from us; he can't live without fresh air."

"Unlikely.” Avery deadpanned. "Considering that I've been asking him to help me with Quidditch before the team tryouts."

“He’s probably busy somewhere,” Mulciber drawled through a yawn.

"It's been days,” Avery huffed. "That bloke, he's always friendly and goofing around here and there, but when you actually look for him, he’s nowhere to be found.”

"He’ll come around.” Edouard Rosier said with assurance, sounding rather bored, and the discussion ended there and then.

Mulciber was then quick to initiate small talk, touching upon the relatively safe topic of his summer adventures. The others shifted along, following the rhythm, and adding their own flavors to the conversational dance.

Strong, powerful, Tom’s Slytherins were like trophies he had collected over the years. They surrounded him like embellishments, their shining qualities complimented Tom’s own superior abilities and added to his overall greatness.

“Who’s that boy behind Dippet?” This caught Tom’s attention, and Avery’s chest heaved with pride, as he was first to notice the mysterious boy. “Never seen him around.”

Ah, it was no other than Harry, the supposed transfer student.

Tom mused silently, transfer students did not settle in so late, did they? He recalled that the oldest one came in around year four, strategically before the OWLs. Even more strange was this boy had only missed the Opening Feast by a few days, which was… singular.

“A transfer student,” Edouard Rosier stated.

“This late into the academic curriculum?!” Mulciber gasped, mouth and eyes wide open and looking exaggeratedly scandalized. “I guess there is a first time for everything.”

Tom scoffed at Mulciber’s poor attempts at dramatics. It was a distasteful display. He himself had practiced the art of acting on numerous accounts, but on a more sophisticated level; he took took advantage of the darker, more manipulative connotation of the art to reach goals of ambitious nature.

“He’s not the only one this year, did you forget... what’s his name again—Yun Hai Li? He’s even older than us, a seventh year.” Avery pointed out.
“That’s totally different,” Mulciber rolled his eyes, exasperated. “It’s called student exchange for a reason.”

“Wherever he’s from,” Lestrange smiled, baring his teeth almost wolfishly. “He’s in for an existential crisis. Hogwarts is by far the most challenging school in Europe in terms of schoolwork.”

“Well, let’s only hope that our new friend is a bright Ravenclaw in the making.” Edouard suggested teasingly.

Dippet—the poor excuse of a Headmaster—walked into the middle of the staff long table, and casted a sonorous charm. “May I have your attention please,” he bellowed, and the chattering and clattering died out in a gradual ripple. “I am excited to announce a new addition to our student body! Hadrian Evans here will be joining us in his Sixth year. He had been previously homeschooled and due to personal reasons,” The old man’s voice faltered to a soft whisper, insinuating he touched upon a sensitive topic. A bit too brash in Tom’s opinion, it sounded unnatural. “—he will resume his studies here at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Students and staff alike, I ask of you to make Hadrian feel at home.”

Tom noted the confident way the boy carried himself alongside Dippet. Harry’s posture was outstanding. Tom was accustomed to judging people based on their coordination, it was a very insightful study and naturally, Tom was quite intuitive. Harry possessed poise that could only belong to a natural leader. The way he had stridden across the Hall, flailing his arms carelessly was with genuine confidence and it drew him out from the crowd.

He was almost Gryffindor-ish, if not for the bitter expression he was wearing. Just like earlier, Harry made little effort to conceal his emotions, if any at all. He was currently glaring holes into the floor, as if holding a grudge, him against the entire universe.

It was also hard to miss the other’s exhausted appearance, and Tom could tell it wasn’t only a reflection of the boy’s poor physical health. Harry had been visibly pushed past a mental breaking point—maybe some form of a trauma, and it flipped the world he had once known. Much like a soldier worn out by war, where there used to be hope and naivety, was replaced by bitterness. Harry was an old lion who had lost the innocence that once fueled his valor.

Dippet spoke a few more words, before urging Evans to sit down at a bench, where he lowered the Sorting Hat.

Tom watched as the boy slipped under the Sorting Hat—with assurance, as if he had gone through the tradition before, yet he seemed uncertain and almost fearful of the outcome of the process.

Harry, Tom noted, was a man of many contradictions, which only added to his growing mystery.

The other also appeared mildly uncomfortable under the excessive attention and looked eager to get on with the sorting as fast as possible. But that clearly backfired, as the sorting had taken unusually long.

“You reckon he still has hopes for Ravenclaw,” Mulciber snickered, knowing fully well that Hadrian did not possess the traits of the raven.

“One glance and I can tell that’s a cute little lion cub,” Lestrange sneered, and there were a few murmurs of agreement.

“Gryffindork,” Avery mocked, the word rolling distastefully on his tongue.
“Why not Slytherin?” Edouard Rosier suggested, and his smile widened with glee. “Now, if you look at that, Evans is arguing with the hat! Only a true Slytherin can pull that off. Take a close look, boys, that’s our new dormmate as of tonight.”

Silence, as Rosier’s words sunk in.

Edouard had proved himself insightful in numerous accounts throughout the years, and the others were very much aware of this. Despite this, his associates were skeptical of Edouard’s remarks, as Mulciber sought an authority figure to break the ambiguity. “What do you think, Tom?”

“I think,” he started silkily. “that Edouard’s got a point.”

Just a second later, the hat announced, “SLYTHERIN!”

“Yes!” Rosier leapt to his feet, clapping furiously amongst the crowd. “This year is going to be interesting!”

The other Slytherins were shocked, speechless as they were.

Avery grunted, and mumbled something along the lines of, “sharing an already too small space.”

Hadrian ‘Harry’ Evans pulled off the sorting hat with a speed fueled by poorly concealed rage and eyed the Sorting Hat with a look of utter betrayal.


Clearly, Slytherin was not his first choice of House.

He nodded curtly at Dippet and set off to join his House table, eyes glued to the floor once again. Evans settled himself at the edge of the long table where the nervous first years were cowering, and it was clear to everyone and anyone that he was in no mood for socializing.

Rosier shot up with excitement, ready to recruit the latest mystery. He ignored the looks of utter disbelief from the others and was about to walk away, but shot his head back in a reluctant swing, his eyes settled on Tom, expectant and frustrated. Conflicted.

Tom relished in the delightful display of submission, before nodding his authorization.

With a jerky sort of movement, Rosier quickly turned away.

Tom mused silently.

Rosier was the perfect man to bring the new Slytherin to him.

After all, Evans seemed to hold an inexplicable animosity toward Tom.

Edouard Rosier was distracting, charismatic, effortlessly persuasive, and ever so careful not to reveal his manipulative tendencies.

Tom poured himself a cup of Earl Grey Tea, before taking a flavorful sip as he watched the new boy fall under Edouard’s smooth manipulations.

Evans would find himself trapped inside Tom’s pit of snakes before he knew it.

~*~

Harry felt eyes following him the moment they walked past the wooden doors to the Great Hall.
He grew aware of the ripple of whispers surging from the tables, growing louder by the second.

Harry had never enjoyed the spotlight, but this time, he noted that it was a foreign sensation that washed over him, because it was the unknown novelty of his new persona which drew their attention, and not his status as Boy-who-lived.

It was refreshing and almost pleasant, if not for the single pair of hazel eyes that Harry was only too conscious of. He did not need to look at the other to feel those dangerous dark orbs following his every movement. They burned into his skin.

And Harry hated it. He hated how even here, where Voldemort did not practically exist yet, Tom Riddle’s presence had such an effect on him. And he hated how he found himself into this situation in the first place!

He was going to blame it all on Riddle.

Harry clearly hadn’t been listening to the previous Headmaster, as Dippet was staring at him expectantly. Realizing Harry wasn’t keeping up with the conversation, he made a gesture and escorted him to a rather small bench.

Harry had almost forgotten all about the Sorting, or Resorting—whatever. He then realized that he wasn’t mentally prepared for the Ceremony at all!

A freakish sort of realization tugged at his stomach nauseatingly.

What if he didn’t make Gryffindor? What if the hat would choose Slytherin this time, as it had once suggested?!

No, no, no!

It was at that very moment that a familiar voice invaded his thoughts.

“Well, well, look what we’ve got here,” the Hat chuckled, sounding like the evil mastermind behind murder in those old muggle movies.

“Hullo,” Harry said unenthusiastically.

“We meet again, hero. Where should I put you this time? hm…”

“Gryffindor!” Harry exclaimed at once. Breathlessly.

"Is that so?"

“You can look into my head, it's all in there, I've been there for 5 years, it's where I belong!”

“Is that what our Savior truly thinks of himself?” The hat questioned.

“Of course!” Harry exclaimed, but there was a slight doubt in his character that the Hat had certainly caught on.

“Not sounding too so of yourself, hm?” The Hat laughed cruelly. “You have been brave, Harry Potter, but I see that the years have not treated you so kindly. Hmm…” the enchanted artefact contemplated in thought. “I see that you have adapted to the harsh environment quite beautifully. For instance, you have learned to act based on logic upon your arrival here, and not pure recklessness, as it has costed you dearly…”

“Isn’t that a Ravenclaw trait?” Harry suggested expectantly.
The Hat completely ignored him.

The git.

“Just like I have once suggested, you would do well in Slytherin.”

Harry made a strangled noise in his head, horrified at the suggestion. “You can’t do that! You can’t put me in the same house as him! He is completely mental... this is dangerous, it can disrupt the entire timeline!”

“I must remind you that you’re not the only one who has been in his mind,” the Hat replied smoothly. “Furthermore, the world lies in your hands, hero, not mine. I only serve as a means to push you toward the right direction.”

“But this is not the right direction!” Harry insisted.

“I claim Slytherin House to be insightful and ... should I say, a challenge for you, it is time that you find yourself surrounded by resourceful people, they will enlighten you.”

“That’s literally the last thing I need!” Harry protested. “I swear, this will not end well,”

“We shall see,” The Hat sounded amused, before bellowing. “Then It better be... SLYTHERIN!”

Harry tore the Hat off his head, incredulous.

Just when he thought things couldn’t get any worse than they already were!

He heard the distant clapping from the Slytherin Table.

Unbelievable. He was now a Slytherin. Harry could imagine the shameful look Ron would throw at him, and Hermione’s disbelief expression, but he knew that, no matter what, they would never shun him, they were his best friends, they would always be there for him.

Except that they weren’t... here, that is.

And he couldn’t believe it. He had always assumed that he would be with his friends, forever. Oh, how he had always taken things for granted... Merlin, he missed them already.

His heart sank as he walked past the table occupied with red robes. Gryffindor’s warm familiarity slipped away as fast it came, as blank faces stared back at him with a contained expression, as if wary of his new status as Slytherin.

Slytherin.

He stepped into snake territory, striding along the long table, feeling calculating eyes assessing him. Not that he cared, they could judge him all day for all he cared!

Harry sat down next to a group of younger students, deciding it was safe territory (obviously, the only criteria was anti Riddle). They eyed him with curiosity, whispering and squeaking, before resuming their usual routine.

Harry took a swig of pumpkin juice, before pausing at a light tap on the shoulder.

“Evans, was it?” a smooth voice queried.

Harry spun around his seat, relieved to see that it was not Riddle.
He looked up at a tall boy with sandy blonde hair and stunning blue eyes. Pronounced aristocratic features, sharp jawline and red sensual lips… Harry couldn’t help but **stare**. The other was very attractive.

“**Edouard Rosier,**” the other introduced, before stretching out an expectant hand. “**Enchanté de faire votre connaissance,**”

Harry did not understand a word.

Dumbfounded, he supposed taking the other’s hand was the only ah, smart option. “Pleasure to meet you, please call me Hadrian,” he said, vaguely noting how the odd sound of his ‘new name’ upon his lips... he had better get used to it soon.

“**Hadrian,**” Edouard Rosier shook his hand enthusiastically, his enchanting blue eyes not leaving Harry’s. “I had to come over, you know,” he said pleasantly. “It was quite a sight, your sorting I mean. Looks like you had a rough tête-à-tête with the Sorting Hat, I can’t help but wonder what had happened there,”

“Er, yeah we had a few disagreements.” Harry admitted truthfully.

“**Hm,**” Rosier stared at him with a knowing expression. His hand slipped from their handshake and found its way to Harry’s shoulder in reassuring squeeze. “I don’t know what stories you heard about Slytherin but have my word when I say we’re the most pleasant bunch,” Edouard Rosier beamed at him. “**Likewise, we are delighted** to have you in Slytherin.”

“I’m sure,” was all Harry said.

Rosier’s full lips curled with excitement. “**Why don’t you come along, Hadrian? Let me present you to my friends,**”

Did Harry have a say in that?

“Uh, I am rather comfortable here, thank you very much,” he protested, but a firm arm slung around his waist, and Harry found himself quite literally dragged toward the other end of the long table.

“**Nonsense,**” Rosier’s smile stretched into a toothy grin, revealing perfect white teeth. “**Courtesy is the prince of virtues, let us not forget about that on your first day here. It is only good mannered to introduce yourself to your other classmate, don’t you agree?**”

He prayed to Salazar Slytherin that Tom Riddle was not in Sixth Year.

“**Aw, no need to look so miserable,**” Rosier patted his back sympathetically. “**Everyone’s more than kind in Slytherin, especially Tom. He’s especially considerate with the new ones.**”

“**Tom Riddle?**” Harry whispered, feeling bile rise in the back of his throat.

Was it just him, or was it that Rosier had just sounded **really** ominous?

“So you’ve met him before,” It wasn’t a question, but a statement. A strange flicker of light glowed in the other’s cerulean eyes, something between excitement and comprehension. “**Now, that would explain his interest in you, I had thought it was uncharacteristic of him,**”

Harry took that as his cue to escape. “Er, I really have to—”

“**Ah, here we are,**” Rosier’s hands made a shooing gesture, and Harry noted a few seats were
“Considering that the seating arrangements are so tight,” Harry promptly started. “I’ll just find myself another—”

“Sit,” came the authoritative voice that could only belong to him, it came from across the table, facing Harry. Great. “I’m sure we could cope.”

And that was how Harry found himself seated in the middle of a group of slimy Slytherin gits. He now had a very good idea what a mouse would feel like in the pit of a snake den.

“Gentlemen,” Rosier said pleasantly. “Why don’t we start with introductions. This is Hadrian Evans, the newest member of our House. Hadrian, this is Tom Riddle, our favorite prefect. I presume you two have already met?”

Yes, much more than Harry liked.

“This is our second encounter,” Riddle confirmed, and settled his dark eyes on Harry. He leaned forward to inspect him openly, and Harry resisted the urge to grab the fork inches away from his hand and stab the git.

“Yes,” he replied tensely.

“It’s nice to meet you so soon again, Evans.” Riddle plastered one of those charismatic fake smiles over his features. “I’m glad you’ll be joining our House. I can’t deny that I’ll be expecting great things from you,”

To an outsider, Riddle's words appeared in every way a compliment, but to Harry, there was a note of challenge to them, patronizing.

Harry replayed Dumbledore’s words not to mix timelines in his mind, until the lines merged, like a broken tape. “Likewise, I’ve heard great things about you,”

That was, undoubtedly, the biggest lie of the century.

“Not even half a day and our transfer student has already heard of my name.” Riddle chuckled lightly, his voice smooth like honey, velvety texture and thick with sweetness. Yuck. “I don’t know whether to be flattered, or pleasantly alarmed.”

“The Headmaster speaks highly of you,” Harry shrugged.

Which he probably did… as he remembered in the memories, Dippet was fond of Riddle, like all the professors were... twisted around Riddle fingers... Dumbledore aside.

"May I interrupt your bonding, I can see a beautiful, blooming friendship ahead you two." Rosier winked, sounding thoroughly excited at the idea, and Harry suppressed the nauseating lurch in his stomach at the suggestion. Rosier proceeded to gesture a tall boy with sharp almond eyes and a light shade of brown hair. Small freckles dotted across his long nose. “Allow me to introduce: Benedict Mulciber,”

“Pleasure to meet you!” Mulciber shook Harry’s hand vigorously, with a smile stretching his lips wide like the Cheshire cat's. “You seem like a very interesting bloke.”

Harry returned a polite smile. “I could say the same to you.”

Mulciber seemed to be one of those people who never stopped smiling.
On the outside he appeared to be your everyday super approachable, friendly bloke, but Harry knew appearances could be deceiving in the house of the snakes, where tall grasses stood high over dirty secrets. Harry wouldn’t be surprised that Mulciber would be the first to back stab him should the opportunity arise.

“This is Atticus Avery,” it was a blonde haired, pointed faced boy with an awful smirk plastered on his face. He was rather strong built, and Harry reminded himself not to get into a fist fight with him.

Harry’s thoughts were confirmed as a strong grip practically crushed his hand. Harry was careful to maintain a cool expression, as he was not giving in to the intimidating boy who reminded him of Dudley.

Avery considered Harry with some sick form of interest, before he grunted. “Avery Atticus, nice to meet you.”

“The pleasure is mine,”

“You look like an elf,” the other stated.

“Excuse me?”

“I could literally snap your wrist in two, look at how thin you are,”

Harry had a very smart comment at the tip of his tongue, when Rosier intervened.

“Now, now, Avery, don’t get carried away... play nice,” the blonde boy said sternly, as if talking to a misbehaving child, before turning back to Harry with a humorless laugh. “I’m sure he was just joking, no need to get worked up, Hadrian. Our Atticus has a rather singular sense of humor,”

Atticus sneered with something like approval, it was quite revolting, really.

Harry chose to ignore him.

“Last but not least,” Rosier gestured to a boy sitting across the table, facing Harry. “I present to you, Randolph Lestrange.”

He tensed at the familiar surname, noting absently that his fingers curled immediately at the mention of something - anything associated with Bellatrix Lestrange, who had killed-

Curly black hair, porcelain white skin, a malicious smile playing at his lips dangerously, haunted dark eyes.

Randolph Lestrange’s deranged looks lived up to the infamous surname.

Lestrange flashed a predatory grin at Harry. He did not, in contrast to his fellow Slytherins, offer to shake hands with Harry, and instead cocked his head to the side in a playful swing.

“My, aren’t you interesting,” he murmured sweetly, beating his dark eyelashes in mockery. “I can’t tell if you’re Pureblood or Mudblood,”

“Maybe because I’m neither,” Harry deadpanned.

“Hmm, a Mudblood, then,” Lestrange said, in that same sugary sweet voice that threatened to flip Harry’s stomach. "Thanks for the confirmation."
“I’m a half-blood,” Harry corrected, before literally quoting Hermione. “If you couldn’t tell the difference in the first place, then maybe it has something to say about your binary system of beliefs rather than my blood heritage.”

Ah, she would be so proud of him.

“Aw, did you hear him? Now, that’s just adorable!” Lestrange cooed, elbowing Avery’s biceps next to him (who grunted distastefully). “A Muggle-lover, too. It’s like those two in one, special editions!”

Harry’s fists curled, his knuckles turning white.

“Randolph,” Riddle warned, softly. Lestrange shot a last look at Harry, before withdrawing into his seat. “so, Hadrian,” Riddle said smoothly, as if nothing unpleasant or inappropriate had happened, looking way too composed and calm, as he took a sip of his bloody tea. “What brings you so late to Hogwarts? We’ve heard of your previous home-schooled based academic curriculum,”

Hadrian Evans’ fabricated back story suddenly came to mind. “Well, my Godfather, he’d been the one to raise me since I was a child—he died.”

There was a sharp intake of air from the others.

“I’m sorry for your loss,” Riddle sounded sincerely apologetic. Harry did not buy it for a second. “How did he… pass away?”

“He was murdered.”

Riddle leaned forward, returning Harry’s gaze mournfully, but upon closer inspection, there was a fascinated, hungry gleam in those dark eyes. “By whom?”

“the Dark Lord,”

Riddle drew back into his seat, as if satisfied by his answer.

The absolute *git*.

“These are dark times we live in,” Edouard Rosier remarked gravely.

“Is it related to the recent attack on Montrose village?” Mulciber whispered.

Harry feigned a surprised expression. “How did you know?”

“It was all over the newspaper,” the other explained. “I don’t think a soul hasn’t heard of it, he is attacking rather close to Hogwarts, isn’t he?”

“The Dark Lord is ruthless,” Lestrange commented, but Harry noted the expression of awe playing at his lips. Disgusting.

“A war is most destructive when innocent lives are lost,” Riddle murmured sensibly, meaning every word of it. It only added to Harry’s increasing dislike for the boy. “At times like these, we can only hope Hogwarts will provide shelter and protection to those in need.”

“Indeed,” Harry looked pointedly at Riddle, noting that Riddle was also parentless, and possibly the only other orphan attending Hogwarts aside Harry himself.

Orphans, Half bloods, two parts of a prophecy, so much in common, yet so different.
Riddle stared back at him, dark tunnel eyes with an expression that Harry couldn’t quite work out, and maybe he did not want to know.

“So you’ve been home-schooled before, by your late Godfather, I presume?” Rosier inquired gently. “What was it like?”

Harry sincerely wished they stop talking about him!

“I’ve been homeschooled my whole life,” Harry said vaguely, in an effort to keep his part of the discussion to a bare minimum. “I guess it’s how things work in small villages.”

“It must have been a unique experience,” Mulciber remarked diplomatically.

“It’s not that interesting, honestly.” Harry heaved a sigh, before looking up expectantly. “I’d rather like to learn more about school life at Hogwarts.”

“You’ll have two years to do that,” Riddle had the audacity to smirk, as he knowingly pushed the topic back to Harry. The git. “Please tell us more about yourself, Hadrian.”

The bloody conversation continued

Chapter End Notes

...and that's a good place to end it.

Still at the generic part, apologies! But I really need the build up, etc., things will get interesting in the next chapter, I promise!

I came to a realization, by the end of this chapter, how difficult it is to write Tom and Harry, especially interacting together...tell me why I chose (arguably) the hardest pairing as my first fanfiction? I'm in for a bumpy ride T.T but the more challenge the better, right? :D

I did my best with the pacing, the characterization, etc., I really hope I don't disappoint, especially with Tom Riddle's POV, if so, please give encouraging suggestions :) I also had fun defining the other characters, what are your thoughts? :)
I am very grateful for the kudos, and lovely comments! I'd like to thank everyone for having faith in this story, as it means a lot to me <3
Without further due,... here's chapter 3!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Tom considered the newest addition to Slytherin with increasing interest.

He studied at the boy’s features - drinking in the pursed lips, noting the panic that flashed through those Avada eyes - to say that the boy was uncomfortable was an understatement.

It was apparent that the other had preferred sitting over in the corner, enjoying his own company, and it was obvious to anyone that he was new to Slytherin’s political climate and its unwritten rules, as he proved himself to be rather clumsy and inexperienced in the conversationalist dance.

Yet, the boy was anything but ignorant. There was the constant caution that lingered in his gaze, sensitive vigilance which instantly escalated to pure hatred when he set eyes on Tom.

Yes, the boy knew things, he knew of the nature of Slytherin politics, he knew an intellectual manipulation when he saw one and above all, he knew Tom.

Other than the contradictory aspects of his personality (as noted by Lestrange), Evans seemed to possess an alarming inconsistence in his overall character. There were times that Tom felt like he was speaking to another person entirely.

It was like Evans had a dual personality, two people in a body.

One would argue that it was the recent unfortunate experiences that explained for his rather… erratic character, but Evans’ grief was too consistent; as if well engrained into his personality. Whatever incident, it must have happened some time ago.

The poorly concealed anger in his posture, the constant tension lingering in his jaw, intense and threatening to burst, his poorly concealed emotions flaring like a filled cauldron that would spill at an additional drop.

And the way he swiftly looked away when Tom’s gaze fell upon him, his back slumped into leisure, his furious expression shifted into a docility. Dull eyes, bland expression, distant, wandering off to another world.

Unacceptable.

It was the former that he had preferred.

The underlying anger and hatred, burning, under think layers of concealment, threatening to lash out at full force… not to mention the ridiculous expressions Evans shot in his direction when he thought Tom was not looking - how amusing.

It only confirmed Tom’s theory that Evans somehow knew him.
“Hadrian,” he called out softly, and the other’s eyes shot up with a delicious flinch, before slipping back into feigned nonchalance. “Accompany me to my prefect rounds, let me give you a thorough tour of the castle.”

Emerald eyes flicked to him, with an utter look of pure horror, before it slipped away, as quickly as it came. “Er, thanks a lot, Riddle, but I don’t want to bother you. I think you already have enough on your plate as prefect.”

“And ignore a fellow Slytherin in need?” Tom returned silkily, not missing a beat. “No, that won’t do, we wouldn’t want our transfer student lost on his first day of school, would we?”

Evans moistened his lips, his mind working on an escape route, a loophole. “That’s very thoughtful of you, Riddle, but isn’t it already quite late? I mean, I wouldn’t want to break school rules, being out after curfew.”

“No worries, I’ll be patrolling the corridors before curfew. Furthermore, I’m confident that Professor Slughorn, our Head of House, would be kind enough to make an exception for us.” he said pleasantly, before softly adding. “I see you are quite familiar with Hogwarts rules, that’s very impressive considering you’ve joined us so briefly”

Evans elected to ignore his statements, which would have been otherwise rather irritating, but for now, Tom found the boy’s suspicious accounts of evasion only to add to his enigmatic persona. How curious.

“Er, thanks, but I’m sure you enjoy your peace of mind during your prefect rounds. I wouldn’t want to ah, be a bother to you.”

“Nonsense,” he replied, flashing his most charismatic smile, not a single lock of hair out of place. “I always make time for friends in need of guidance. And I would be lying if said I don’t want to take the opportunity to know you better. After all, you seem like a very interesting person.”

Ah, there it was again. The utter look of indignation when he attempted friendly association with the boy. Others would jump at the suggestion, seizing the chance to stick – like a leech - disgustingly close to Tom, whereas Evans turned away. Literally.

Emerald eyes fluttered absently, spacing out into the Great Hall, as if disbelieving everything around him was actually happening—dismissing Tom—nobody ever dismissed Tom like that, not even Dumbledore.

“That’s… considerate of you, Riddle.” The other stared pointedly at a group of younger students. “I’m sure I can find my way around though. Honestly, I think you’re better off helping out some First Years.”

“That didn’t seem like the case when I found you quite literally sprawled across the floor,” Tom smirked, relishing in the amused sounds voiced from his snakes’ direction. “You looked rather… disoriented…if I dare say.”

Bright emerald orbs snapped to him, jaw clenched, glaring. A flush of crimson tinted the boy’s cheeks, with a luscious mixture of rage and embarrassment. Tom could feel the other’s silent fuming, conflicted, fluctuating hesitantly between personas.

How interesting.

To an outsider, Tom’s words appeared a teasing remark, a friendly taunt at most, but somehow to Evans, the underlying mocking tone came out as a full-fledged threat.
Whatever sentiments and opinions Evans held for Tom, the boy was consumed with it—blinded by it. It was quite fascinating. Tom had never seen so much hate directed toward him—it had been usually looks of adoration, or the occasional petty sentiments.

For the first time, Tom had no idea where such profound emotions came from.

He hated not knowing.

Tom rejoiced in Evan’s troubled state of mind, and leaned in closer, bending his neck to lower himself to an eye-to-eye level with the boy, which clearly added to Evans’ frustration. “Hadrian, I must insist,” he murmured softly.

Around them, the snakes watched the scene display before them with idle curiosity, catching onto every word, every motion of an action, each forming their opinion of the new boy.

Evans’ hands curled with tension.

The lion was waking up.

But the snake slithered silently, coiling around its throne possessively.

Evans moistened his lips, before starting hesitantly. “You see, I prefer to er, discover things on my own. It makes things more exciting, you know what I mean?”


The wild ones were the most fun to break.

“Very well,” Tom said. “I know exactly what you mean, Hadrian,”

Evans surveyed him with caution.

“I suppose I’ll do my rounds in solitude,” he heaved a disappointed sigh and rose from his throne, drawing his snakes’ attention. “I’m afraid I’ll have to leave you in the company of my associates, as I have Prefect duties to attend to. I’ll trust my good friend Edouard to guide you through our Common Room—it’s quite the beauty, I’m positive you’ll take immediate liking to it. I assure you Slytherin is not lacking in hospitality, if not the greatest of all Houses.”

His eyes raked to his associates, pausing pointedly at Lestrange and Avery, who shifted apprehensively.

Good.

He caught Evans’ gaze, drinking in the green tones of those stunning Avada eyes.

“Hadrian, Welcome to Slytherin.”

~*~

The Dungeons were, as he had remembered, an explosion of green and silver, the two colors clashed with elegance. The stone walls were adorned with intricate patterns, lines twisting and turning like a snake’s silhouette. A thick carpet embellished the entirety of the floor, dark green of course, slipped underneath luxurious sofas, wooden coffee tables and armoires shelving proud trophies.

In short, everything screamed Slytherin—because of course, this was the Dungeons, not
Gryffindor Tower.

Harry wondered if he could ever get used to it.

“Behold: Slytherin Common Room,” Rosier announced proudly, his bright cerulean eyes studying Harry with distant scrutiny. “more commonly known as the Dungeons,”

Harry found himself studying the room, with a mixture of fabricated awe (he did have to take the role of a country boy, after all) and genuine fascination. There was something enchanting about the Dungeons, which remained unchanged through the long drawl of the centuries, a timeless beauty, as if frozen in time.

Which reminded Harry how this whole travel-to-the-past was completely absurd, it was hard to believe this was actually happening, despite the very obvious evidence presented before him.

It was like he was living a dream.

“This is where we’ll be lounging in our temps libre,” Rosier elaborated. “Whether you’ll be reading a book, drafting an assignment, or indulging in a friendly game of chess,” blue eyes landed on two students engaged in Wizard Chess, surrounded by a small crowd betting their galleons on a winner. “I said lounging, but do not be fooled by the more passive connotation of the word. This is where active socialization happens. It’s a great opportunity to acquaint yourself with students of the other years—”

In other words, Slytherin politics: making connections, following unwritten rules, breaking written rules, playing mind games, emotional manipulations, back-stabbing…

Harry figured as much.

“—you’d be missing out if you don’t come down here every once in a while. Trust me when I say that the most interesting conversations in the entire school are held here,”

“You’d know all about that,” Avery sneered in a manner that would make Draco Malfoy proud.

The other boys exchanged a knowing look, biting back a snigger.

“It’s where Edouard courts all the beautiful ladies,” Mulciber explained snidely, smiling nonetheless. “You’ll find him surrounded by a dozen of them during breaks. It’s no wonder the rest of us are single, they are all taken!”

“Eddy is a natural ladies’ man,” Lestrange said, licking his lips. “We can’t blame him. It’s engrained in his French origins.”

“Gentlemen,” Edouard waved a dismissive hand. “I believe this is an Era where relations between girls and boys are not limited to such restricting interests.”

Avery sneered. “That’s rubbish.”

Rosier ignored him. “I take advantage of a period of social change to form useful friendships with sophisticated demoiselles with bright minds and bright futures. I suggest you do the same.”

“How about you introduce a couple of your friends to us, then.” Lestrange teased, but there was an odd note of challenge in his voice.

“Listen to them,” Rosier whispered to Harry, loud enough for the others to hear. “It’s no wonder cultivated ladies are repulsed by their company, with their old-fashioned views and cheap
gentleman mannerism.”

Harry returned a good-natured smile.

“Enough idle chatter, let us resume our ah, mini-tour, before I was rudely interrupted.” Edouard Rosier gestured a stoned spiral staircase. “The boys’ dormitory will be this way. After you, Hadrian.”

He needn’t be told twice.

They stepped into the Sixth Years’ dormitory, revealing 6 four-posted beds—one draped (it definitely was Harry’s), sitting by a large window. The room gave off a surprisingly cozy atmosphere, as opposed to the colder environment Harry had expected of the Dungeons. It would have looked just like the Gryffindor dorm, albeit the obvious shades of green and the window casting into distant obscurity that was the Black lake.

“New boy found the sweet spot,” Lestrange drawled, whistling lowly.

Harry shot a questioning look.

“That would be Tom’s.” Mulciber informed him, his chin pointing to the bed adjacent to Harry’s.

“Tell you what, Lestrange.” He said, a bit too hastily. “You’re more than welcome to switch places with me,”

“How thoughtful of you,” Harry established by now that Lestrange’s voice had a default mocking quality to it, a baseline hostility which could only grow with the boy’s mood. Great. “But as much as I find Tom’s company delightful, I’m not eager to deal with his mood swings first thing in the morning,”

Well wasn’t that just encouraging.

Harry must have appeared exactly as devastated as he was, as Rosier inquired. “Pardon my curiosity, but I can’t help but notice; you don’t seem too fond of Tom. May I ask why that is?”

Because he killed my parent –

“Oh,” Harry appeared to be at loss for words. “Er, it’s nothing personal, he just reminds me of someone I know. That’s all.”

There was an uncomfortable silence.

He could practically feel the Slytherins shifting around him, coiling like snakes, devouring this new piece of information hungrily, and adjusting accordingly, observing potential prey before striking.

“Perhaps it would be in your best interest keep your thoughts to yourself,” Mulciber said, and he was no longer smiling. “Your opinion is not very popular in this side of the castle.”

Rosier, who was the only Slytherin remotely fond of Harry (and the sentiment was returned), came to his rescue. “Tom is good company when he wants to be, I’m sure you two can work out your differences and get along just fine.” he casted him a sympathetic smile, before looking out the window. “Anyway, I think this is a wonderful spot deserving of envy. You’ve got the close-up view of the beautiful Black Lake, how nice is that?”

It was, in Harry’s opinion, a very gloomy landscape, but completely suitable for his current mood.
He stared into the endless basin of the Black Lake, a pang of melancholy spreading through his chest.

Had it been any other night, Harry would be looking down at the school grounds, freshly covered with a coat of early December snow, gazing into the distant sky and thinking of a brighter future. The next second, he’d be bent over, laughing at one of Ron’s jokes, and picking the snot flavored candy from the Jelly Belly Bertie Bott’s Every Flavor Beans.

It was at times like this, only when he’d been torn away from his friends, his family—everything he held dear to, that Harry realized how much he had taken things for granted, and how very much alone he was now…

Things honestly couldn’t get worse for Harry; he was presently stuck half a century in the past, possibly forever, having permanent sleepover arrangements with baby Death Eaters and the teenaged Dark Lord himself!

He would rather face off Voldemort in a very unfair (as they often were) battle—in the graveyard, in the Ministry, anywhere with an open field, where he’d be fighting with his very life on the line—than sleeping in the same room as Tom bloody Riddle… that was just too wrong….

This was a nightmare.

“Hadrian?”

Harry blinked.

“Hadrian,” Rosier repeated, with concern. “I’ve called your name several times, are you alright?”

“Feeling a bit dizzy, is all,” Harry admitted.

He couldn’t ignore the fatigue burning his head, twisting his vision and senses into a buzzy blur. He had never felt this exhausted before. Yet, Harry remembered sleeping in this morning—he wasn’t exactly tired per se… it was, instead, an unfamiliar void, a distinct hollowness which grew upon his arrival here, draining and depleting his magical core of its essence.

“You must feel overwhelmed after everything that happened.” Rosier said softly. “We’ll give you some room, so make sure to rest up, Hadrian. You are welcome to join us, of course, we’ll be in the lounge.”

Harry nodded.

One after the other, the boys withdrew from the room, some looking rather relieved, as if escaping a forced interaction, while others appeared notably more disappointed, much like children torn away from their favorite toy—Harry couldn’t bring himself to care at the moment.

Upon gaining his newfound privacy, Harry kicked off his shoes and jumped onto the bed – his bed, now.

He stared at the dull stoned ceiling, watching the emerald chandelier dangle above him.

Reality was sinking in, horribly. His mind was spinning in a whirl of panic, as the events of the night replayed in his head.

The intense attention Riddle had paid to him tonight was alarming – it couldn’t have just been Harry’s imagination – those dark tunnel eyes lingered on his skin far, far too long to be a healthy interest (even for a psychopath) and there was a hungry quality to them that unsettled Harry, to say
Harry had to be more careful next time, it would be prudent to lay a low profile during his stay here, while Dumbledore worked out a way back for him.

A thousand thoughts coursed through his mind, but his eyelids were starting to feel rather heavy; Harry could feel his brain shutting off, casting away his present problems and finding comfort in the trouble-free world that was the unconscious state of oblivion.

He told himself to stay awake, he was not going to sleep here, of all places. He was vulnerable… he couldn’t, he dared not to…

Fatigue took over.

If Riddle came back that night, Harry wouldn’t know.

~*~

It was deep into the night when Tom retired to Slytherin Dorm – much later than most – but it was, all in all, a fruitful evening.

He loosened his tie as he watched, hungrily, the sleeping form of Hadrian ‘Harry’ Evans.

The boy’s features were surprisingly soft, now that those ridiculous, round wired glasses were resting on the desk, and not distorting his face. The usual furrowed brows now rested with ease, the normally pursed lips plump with leisure, his chest rising and falling at a steady pace.

Like this, Evans looked naïve, innocent even – vulnerable – layers of barriers crashed down, and all that was left: a mere sixteen-year-old, in contrast to the tired, haunted look that betrayed those bright emerald eyes, experience that seemed too heavy to carry for so young a boy.

Tom realized that he had never played with this kind before; they had usually come in various flavors of perfection, and he had enjoyed tearing them piece by piece, meticulously, picking apart the carefully shaped foundations… after all, there was beauty in destruction…

Although Evans did not possess the quick, cunning mind Tom constantly demanded from his playthings, there was a spark of talent in his quick – almost witty comebacks – rough on the edges, of course, but that only meant that there was more space for molding. More importantly, there was an admirable strength of character that he always found fun to play with, hidden of course, under layers of concealment, but that was going to change…

…and such an independent specimen demanded a different approach from his usual course of actions.

It made Tom’s heart race with adrenaline, the rush was like hunting a wild animal.

Things just got interesting.

Chapter End Notes

A short, rather uneventful chapter, but I thought it would be insightful to glimpse into our main characters' thought processes before diving into action :)
I'll see you guys in the next chapter!

P.S. I'm leaving for China soon, so I don't know when I'll be able to update, given that so many western websites are banned... otherwise I'll do my best to stick to my 'update every few weeks' rule :)
Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

AHHHHHH im so so sorry for being late on this one... but on the bright side, at least it's longer than the previous chapters???
China was restless, because my ~338535 relatives were insistent on visiting me every other day, and travelling in itself was rather exhausting, but all in all, it was a most delightful trip :D I had also reached writer's block (so early in the fic, I know!) so that did not help with the update.... I honestly still feel quite insecure about this fic, because it is my first and I am overwhelmed by so many aspects of story writing... perhaps I could use a kind beta? Where do I find those angels? Help?
Anyhow, I am most grateful for your lovely comments, generous kudos <3 and general faith in this story! Thank you ~
OKAY IMMA STOP BLABBERING AND LET Y'ALL ENJOY THE FIC :)
P.S. I also apologize for the confusion I created yesterday (to those who have subscribed to my fanfic and received email alerts), because i had this chapter posted last night, and removed it immediately due to excessive typos and awkward phrasings.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was a dream.

Because the next morning, laying silently awake in bed, eyes squeezed with a strange resolution, Harry awaited, expected, the familiar sight of an excessively freckled face, one he was too accustomed to see early in the day, and yet for a mysterious reason, he found himself most comforted by the mental sight of it, much more so than ever – a strange and most unusual sentiment, and perhaps it was to assume that yesterday’s bizarre reverie, of a handsome, dark eyed stranger, had to do with his present state of mind; one of confusion and vagueness. However, one thing was certain; to expect Sirius, his late Godfather to be the one to greet him was the last thing on his mind.

But there he was; his Godfather, standing at the foot of his bed. From the window, a soft string of sunlight caressed the side of his grave face; his once handsome features glowed amidst the golden light, shining with newfound youth.

There was no space for thinking; Harry hauled himself at Sirius, wrapping his arms around the older man in a tight embrace, half amazed, half in disbelief at the very real touch of fabric at the tip of his fingers. Harry squeezed, in this gut-wrenching, unreasonable fear that Sirius would disappear again from him.

Sirius, on the other hand, appeared alarmed at the sudden intimacy - of course, he would not understand – but there was plenty of time later, and Harry would explain later, the things he went through, or thought he had gone through in his dream...

Yes, a dream. A bad dream - a horrible nightmare that spanned so long it seemed to last forever, but it did not matter anymore; he was finally awake now.

He was home.
"Evans, get a grip, hey - Hadrian Evans!"

Harry immediately pulled away at the sound of that strange, eerily familiar name, a horrible dread growing in his chest...

He stared at his Godfather's face - grasping on to every detail – as he watched, with horror, those deep lines dissolving, the terrible evidence of Azkaban melting - years of age fleeting away - until all that was left was smooth ivory skin, clear black eyes, and short raven locks.

A younger version of his godfather, except, it wasn’t exactly Sirius.

“Er, good morning…” the Sirius look-alike started hesitantly. He looked very pale. Ashen, almost, and appeared more than uncomfortable.

“Name’s Orion Black, I just wanted to tell you that we’ve got Potions in about 30 minutes, so you have ought to make haste.” He paused to steal a glance at Harry, as if not daring to, before immediately turning away and speaking in a very rapid voice. “I’ll see you in class, Evans.”

Harry stared at the place where the boy had left just a second ago.

He then realized that his cheeks were wet with hot tears.

~*~

Tom nibbled at his toast absently, his eyes raking over the large door of the Great Hall every few moments, looking for the slightest sign of Evans.

Slughorn, it appeared, was in a similar state of mind, except the older wizard was much more explicit in his pursuit for the transfer student; his temple was rolling with droplets of sweat as he walked down the length of Slytherin table and with every step his frantic breathing grew heavier.

“Tom! Just the man I need! Have you seen Mr. Evans? No? Oh my, I do hope he turns up soon, as I happen to have a class to teach, you see! I’ll see you shortly in Potions, my dear boy.”

The second the Potions master stepped out of hearing range, Mulciber attempted to articulate a full sentence through a mouthful of bacon and egg, but obviously failing so, as nobody quite understood what he had to say.

Edouard scrunched his nose in disgust. “That’s a hideous sight, Benedict. Do us all a favor and close your mouth – have some décorum.”

“How can you be concerned with my table manners,” Mulciber finally said, after gulping down a large bolus of food, before staring at Edouard exasperatedly. “when Evans is late on his first day? He’s making a far worse impression, isn’t he?”

Edouard Rosier looked amused.

“Orion, I believe you were last of us to leave the dormitory.” Tom drawled silkily, watching the Black heir’s reaction carefully. “surely you remembered to wake the boy?”

“I did!” Orion exclaimed. “And I must confess; I had thought for a second that I had found a dead body straight out of a crime scene! You see, I had to shake him a good dozen of times before he showed the slightest sign of living!”

Avery snorted. “If it was me I would have –”
“That’s no good.” Mulciber started, and this caught the group’s attention. “From what I recollect, Evans had gone to bed at eight last night – eight o’clock! And now you tell me he can’t rise at 8 in the morning? A most ridiculous, impractical sleep schedule! Never mind him; you do realize this will impact us, who happen to be his dormmates!”

“Don’t worry your little head over it,” Rosier interjected smoothly. “Evans is mind and body unbalanced by the war and such. Side effects such as irregular sleep patterns are only natural; this is a temporary phase.”

Mulciber hummed into his black coffee but appeared unsatisfied.

“Sounds even more suspicious to me,” Randolph decided to join the conversation. “I’ve seen people mourn. If they don’t first get consumed with the shock, it’s the sleep deprivation that eats them alive, and that was some premium quality sleep princess has got back there.”

“Aren’t you a ray of sunshine. Always eager to give us an optimistic boost in the morning, are you?” Orion Black teased. “Anyhow, as fascinating as I find this elaborate discussion of the new boy’s sleeping habits, I think that we should be more concerned by the obvious fact that he’s probably lost his way here.”

“Well, that’s his fault for refusing Tom’s offer,” Avery said.

“I must admit it was not a very smart move of his.” Mulciber commented and threw a quick, furtive look at Tom (which he returned with equal haste), before staring with great interest at the silver spoon held in his hand.

“All those who wander are not lost.” Edouard’s elusive voice rang over the silence, entailing a resonant quality, which merged with Tom’s thoughts curiously.

“What do you mean, Edouard?” Tom pressed, interest piqued.

“You all heard him last night, Hadrian said he’d ‘like to discover things himself’, did he not? I’m under the impression that it’s exactly what he’s up to at the moment.”

“Hm,”

“Speaking of which,” Avery clearly had been waiting for Edouard to finish on the subject before pointing an accusatory finger at Orion. “Where were you last night? And the night before that, and the one before that!”

Orion paused in the middle of drinking pumpkin juice, before his features slid into a mischievous smirk. “So you have noticed my absence as of late.”

“Who would not notice something like that! And you promised me you’d assist me with my flying!”

“Oh – I suppose I did.” The other replied lightly, not sounding the least apologetic.

“Then what were you doing all this time?”

“You know, a bit of this and that…”

“It sounds like you’re evading the question. Is there something you’d rather not tell us, Orion?” Mulciber said.

“Yes, that’s quite correct,” he quipped. “My activities are a matter of the upmost discrecy, top
secret. Only VIPs allowed.”

“Jokes aside, Orion, we are most eager to learn to what occasions do we owe your mysterious disappearances… please go on.” pursued Edouard.

“Damn, to think that I hold such a precious place in your busy, sophisticated minds to deserve such attention and curiosity… I am very quite touched!” Orion beamed, before searching for his words in the vaguest tone possible. “Let’s say I finally realized the great importance that is my education, so I began this side project – extracurricular activities, really, with a group of interesting folks. And I must admit; I find it very rewarding to acquaint with people – talented people, who just so happen, by chance of course, to belong to a variety of Houses.”

“Very well,” Tom replied, which turned his associates’ attention to him. “I am most pleased to see that you take your academic profile into greater consideration than your previous… carefree attitude. While I agree with the prospect of extending your connections to people of different backgrounds, I do insist your… devotions remain stemmed to our group.”

Black smiled sheepishly. “Of course… of course… anything you say, Tom.”

Tom smiled thinly.

The subject of interest had clearly passed, as the breakfast had otherwise proven to be painfully uneventful, hopping from subject to subject with little sense and objectivity – a discussion of everything and nothing.

The conversation, unanimated as it already was, turned to a dreadful direction as it re-encountered the wearied topic of his associates’ summer accomplishments. Tom could feel Mulciber in particular trying to catch his attention with his excessive babble about his father’s new connection with the French Ministry. He ignored him, turning his head away from the freckled boy and could sense the other’s disappointment.

Tom mused silently as he observed Edouard Rosier, by far the most interesting of his associates (and the most visually appealing).

Edouard’s back straightened with tension; the other boy had felt his eyes lingering on him. The reflex was lovely.

Tom licked his lips.

Edouard had been delightful to break. His resistance against Tom’s advances lasted tenaciously long, before submitting to Tom.

It was almost a pity; the once so proud boy was now a ghost of his past glory, having come to terms with his inferior position to Tom, his pride forever wounded.

But Rosier was a necessary recruit to his circle, and therefore Tom was careful not to completely break the strong spirit that fueled his valuable qualities. As if to prove Tom’s point, there were those occasional streaks of defiance and attitudes he gave Tom, which were quite enjoyable.

Next to him, Orion Black failed to suppress a shudder, clearly having sensed the predatory intent oozing from him.

Ah yes, Black was… a special case. But Tom knew he had to recruit the Black heir, as the surname hanging over the boy emitted power and heritage, two assets that coincided with his cause.
Lestrange and Avery, on the other hand, were powerful and ruthless, two qualities that Tom demanded come hand in hand, and it was their raw strength which drew them toward Tom, much like big masses gravitating around a greater force.

He had also collected useful contacts in the other years – Malfoy, Nott, Dolohov and much more - and he was obviously in favor with most of the professors.

It was almost funny how easy it was – shower them with flattering words, offer small favors here and there - cheap expenses which, in return, earned Tom such vast power around the tip of his fingers.

He could only imagine the magnitude of influence he would obtain as a professor – an authority figure looming over thousands of students, shaping and perfecting those tiny little heads into infinite possibilities…

Tom’s eyes, which wandered the length of the staff table, found, once again, the entrance door to the dining hall.

It was 8:30 and even the last stream of late-students had dissipated, and still no sight of Evans.

Curious.

By all means, his absence from his first meal was a terrible move by Slytherin standards… but just like Edouard suggested, was it a deliberate one?

He supposed he would find out soon enough.

~*~

Harry reached Potions class moments before the bell signaling the start of class had rung.

He felt the cool dungeon air hit his skin, and the accompanying strong smell of mixed ingredients and exotic potions brought a breeze of wakening to him and sharpened his senses, as he stepped into the classroom with his breakfast toast still hanging from his mouth.

“Ah, there you are, Mr. Evans!” came a very close voice behind him. A very round man appeared at the entrance, panting heavily, as if he had completed a very challenging marathon. “I had been searching all over the place for you!”

It was Professor Slughorn, who in possession a more youthful glow to his complexion, looked a few decades younger. He had thick patches of straw blonde locks and a colorful moustache of an interesting shade of ginger in the classic shape of a walrus. Otherwise, the man was comparably plump, and sported lavish clothes that finally seemed to suit the current fashion.

“Here’s your time table.” Professor Slughorn huffed, still recovering from the physical exercise, before staring accusingly at the toast dangling between Harry’s lips, as if it were the source of his troubles. “Good gracious, where did you get that toast? I was certain I was the last person to leave the Great Hall this morning!”

“Er,” Harry smiled weakly. “A very kind Hufflepuff prefect directed me to the kitchens, sir, I was running thin on time, you see.”

There was a brief pause.

Harry was so convinced that Slughorn was going to give him detention, or at least dock House points (there goes his ‘lay a low profile and do not look for trouble’ plan) that he almost jumped
when the Potions master slammed Harry’s shoulder with his sausage-like fingers, roaring with laughter.

“Right you are, m’boy!” the older man winked. “One is never too early to make connections; they get you places, don’t they?”

Harry would have otherwise babbled uncomfortably under Slughorn’s fixation … but he had went through far worse as the Boy-who-Lived.

“Thank you, sir. Following your steps, of course.”

“Welcome indeed to Slytherin, my very own House! You’ll settle right in, I assure you.” Now that Slughorn’s attention diverged from the toast, his black, button-like eyes froze on Harry’s face. “Oh my – say, do you happen to know Fleamont Potter? You look mighty like him – I think it has to do with the nose… so, are the two of you related?”

“I’ve never heard of him.” Harry said truthfully. “I suppose you know him well, sir?”

“Well, of course! Fleamont is an old acquaintance of mine, and, I must admit, a wonderful potioneer!” Slughorn exclaimed, evidently happy to be asked. “He invented the Sleekeasy hair potion and made quite the fortune with the company… a well accomplished man through and through, no doubt of it! Not to mention…” he trailed off, now seeming to be talking to himself.

But Harry listened intently to the older man. He watched fervently as the other’s bright eyes shone with pride and followed the high and low pitches of the older man’s voice, catching onto every detail of the man named Fleamont Potter, who must be one of Harry’s relatives… for a few moments, he too, he too, joined in the dazzling world that Slughorn must be seeing when telling these tales.

For the first time, Slughorn’s excitement was contagious; a bubble of hope fluttered in Harry’s stomach when he realized that Fleamont Potter was very possibly his own grandfather! Maybe… just maybe… Harry could see him… catch a glimpse of his grandfather… finally see a member of his family alive…?

But he was suddenly reminded, that with the infinite possibilities of time travel, how utterly dangerous - reckless it was to play with the elements of time… so much can go wrong… there could be grave and irreversible consequences, just like Dumbledore had so plainly warned him.

Slughorn cleared his throat, as if just realizing that he had a class to teach. “Now, Mr. Evans, why don’t you sit down next to Tom up here? We’ll be continuing working on the Elixir from last class and I’m sure Tom’s guidance will be more than helpful.”

Harry felt all traces of hope leave his face.

He looked around the room, feeling his hopes drop even further (if that was even possible) when he saw that the only available seat was – how strange – next to Tom Riddle.

“Hadrian.” Riddle greeted silkily, as Harry slid into the vacant chair next to him. “I’m surprised you made it on time.”

“No need to look so disappointed.” Harry said hotly, before he could stop himself.

Tom stared at him for a few moments, before slightly tilting his head and issuing a smooth, velvety laugh. “No, you misunderstand me, Hadrian. I’m quite relieved – impressed even – I had thought you’d get lost without my guidance, but it looks like you’re doing very well so far on your first day, I must admit I underestimated you. Well done, new boy.”
Harry felt his mouth gape open at the other, not sure what to say. Did... did baby Voldemort just – compliment him?

“What interests me more, however,” Riddle continued, dark eyes not leaving Harry’s bright green. “is how you had found the Hogwarts Kitchens – tricky place, isn’t it? One must be very familiar with Hogwarts grounds to discover its location.”

“You heard me, a Hufflepuff prefect directed me.” Harry replied, in what he considered an excessively defensive tone.

“How… very kind of them,” Riddle returned softly. “And what was their name?”

“I was in a hurry,” Harry said, silently fuming. “I forgot to ask them.”

“Surely you remember what they looked like?” Riddle questioned, hazel eyes burning into Harry’s skin. “Or were you also too busy to spare a glance?”

“I don’t see how this is any of your business.” Harry snapped, jaw clenched.

“Oh, I think this is very much my business… Alas, I was hoping to thank this mysterious badger for helping out a fellow snake in need.” Riddle said, as if it was the most obvious thing ever. “Well, I suppose that’s not likely to happen. Pity.”

Pity.

Yeah right. Riddle looked way too satisfied, too smug to actually mean it; Riddle obviously did not believe Harry and was definitely not too shy to hide it.

Slimy, sneaky, suspicious prat.

He could feel Riddle studying him. That staring, far too intense for Harry’s liking, and those dark eyes, the same hungry expression as the previous night.

But Harry was determined to ignore Riddle’s intense scrutiny – he was not going to falter under the other’s attention, and he was not going to let it appear that it was affecting him – let him watch all he wanted!

Harry decided to focus on Professor Slughorn’s instructions, and scribbled notes down on a parchment, but the older man’s words zoned out like a thread of blank words spoken in a strange, unfamiliar language, and his mind drifted off…

When he finally looked up, Riddle was no longer paying Harry any heed – in fact, he was focused on the potion as if it was the single most interesting thing in the world… all previous hints of curiosity in Harry evaporated.

Harry frowned… not that he was complaining, but it was rather alarming how Riddle’s attention could shift so drastically… it was scary how a psychopath’s mind worked.

Harry spent the rest of the class following Riddle’s orders – how ironic – they worked surprisingly well together and were the most advanced team in the process of potion making (not to Harry’s surprise).

Slughorn’s throaty voice hung over the room, as he assessed the students’ cauldrons.

“Hm… not half bad, charming Rose and her bright partner Lucy, what a fine example of inter-House bonding – five points to Hufflepuff and Slytherin each!”
“Miss Greengrass, stop ogling Mr. Rosier – we all know he’s a charming lad - eyes on your potion, dear, no, that’s Salamander blood!”

There was a few more, “Careful, Mr. Smith, two porcupine quills, not three!” and “Merlin’s Beard, quick, escort your friend to the Hospital Wing immediately, this ingredient melts into the skin!” before the older man stopped at their cauldron.

“Perfect!” Slughorn exclaimed, his eyes shining with delight. “Couldn’t have done it better, myself! Ten points to Slytherin!”

“Thank you, sir, however, all credit should be given to the great Potions Master,” Riddle said angelically.

Slughorn chuckled pleasantly, and Harry could see his cheeks tinting pink. The older man turned toward Harry, but his small, bead-like eyes were eager to set back on Riddle. “I see you’re catching up very quickly under Tom’s guidance. Always looking out for others, eh? I knew I would never regret my decision; he makes a wonderful prefect, don’t you agree, Mr. Evans?”

It took all of Harry’s willpower to respond civilly.

“You’re too kind, Professor Slughorn.” Tom replied in a voice so sweet that Harry wondered if they would all die of sugar overdose.

“Always the modest student, Tom.” Slughorn said approvingly. “But if there is a thing such as too modest…”

Harry turned away because he was sure his face had turned as green as the potion.

This time travel business was no good for his mental health.

~*~

Tom stirred the contents of his cauldron with delicacy, watching intently as the yellow, butter-like consistency simmered into rainbow sparks – a hideous sight, but he must admit the aroma seeping from the dancing smokes of his potion emitted a pleasant fragrance, as most elixirs do.

The roaring burst of early September sun persisted throughout the week, and this contributed to his potion’s maturation, as its rich odor suggested ripeness and its color glowed a most vibrant yellow, as if the liquid possessed, within its texture, an ability to shine with the eternal vitality of an undying star. It was to mention that the pleasant weekend had also brought an interesting and most unusual addition to his House, and though he must give credit to his most successful Elixir to induce Euphoria, it was truly his newest snake and most recent mystery who inspired such fervent amusement in him.

“Are we done?” Evans asked, giving away a weak smile – nothing like the dangerous emerald eyes Tom had witnessed from the moment of their first encounter.

“Not quite,” he said, inspecting the potion’s content. “The elixir is by all means flawless, yet something is missing, a small piece to complete the puzzle - a missing ingredient, quite literally.”

“But we’ve followed all the steps from the textbook.” The boy insisted, in a manner a mediocre student would sidestep further work for achievement in favor for laziness and incompetence. It was most unnatural, however; Evans was an outstandingly bad actor.

“Yes, but since when do true potioneers follow instructions written in a textbook?” Evans
shrugged and to this, Tom ensued suavely. “Now, my dear partner, what say you, should we add a sprig of peppermint?”

“Oh - right.” Evans said immediately, as if the suggestion had struck a particularly vivid memory. “But how do you know that?”

“Intuition,” he replied. “And if my guess is accurate and my calculations precise, the peppermint will counteract unwanted side effects of the potion such as excessive singing and nose tweaking.”

Evans gave him a long look; one which Tom could not decipher; a most unusual occurrence, for Tom prided himself greatly in his talent for observation...

It seemed that the continuous study of the boy’s character raised more questions than answers.

“Great, then we’re really done now?” Evans asked, sounding relieved and his shoulders dropped meekly, though Ton could see the tension in his eyes. “Damn, I haven’t brewed such a difficult potion before… I thought the steps would never end.”

“You handled it quite well yourself,” Tom said smoothly. “And in all honesty, between the two of us, I’d say you’re better than most of the gormless idiots Slughorn partners me up with… in fact, it’s not an exaggeration to say that we make a delightful team… don’t you agree?”

Evans hummed, but from the corner of his eyes, Tom could see the boy grimace in his direction, and that the boy abused when he thought Tom wasn’t looking. It was quite amusing how oblivious he sometimes was.

“Let me see your timetable, Hadrian. I’ll take the opportunity to make up for this morning’s messy haste and guide you through your upcoming classes.”

Evans froze, eyeing him with a startled look, before it was all concealed by guarded caution. “Er, that’s quite alright, I think I got it. Though I appreciate the gesture, Riddle.”

Curious. Truly incompetent wizards could not afford to decline such a generous offer, especially if presented to them twice; they were always quick to seek the smallest bids that proved advantageous to their substandard circumstances and abilities... not push them away.

Evans was doing it all wrong.

“Hadrian, I think we’ve gone through this many a time before; I’d prefer if you call me Tom.”

“Right.” Evans said, with apparent difficulty. “But in all honesty, I’d say we’re not at that advanced stage of… er, friendship.”

“And if I recall correctly, to take a closer step to friendship requires the comfort of addressing one another on a first name basis.”

“OK, if you insist.”

“Yes, I do insist, and the curious thing is that you still haven’t addressed me by my given name.” he paused, leaning closer to the boy. “While I find your disposition very intriguing, I must suspect; is this your way of playing hard to get, or is this a refusal of your part to accept my offer of camaraderie?”

Hadrian opened his mouth, closed it, then opened it again only to spout broken chords of inaudible nonsense.
Edouard Rosier, who had been listening in the conversation from behind Hadrian’s back, seized his timetable. This seemed to ease him, but only momentarily, for though his answer was postponed, his schedule was laid out plain:

“Potions, Herbology, Charms, Defense, Transfiguration… and History of Magic. Very interesting selection of N.E.W.T.s, Hadrian, quite generic, as most courses are required for higher education, but the latter has rather caught my attention; you didn’t strike me as the type to delve into History of Magic.”

“Er – the entire history of magic and wizards it well - it’s interesting, yeah.”

“A fascinating study indeed.” Tom said. “The building of civilization has much to say about our present, but also future as a society.”

“Exactly my point.” Evans said breathlessly.

“Pity, I would have taken up the subject as well, if I hadn’t abused the maximum number of N.E.W.T.s allotted. Perhaps we could strike up a conversation on the subject, some time it suits you fancy. It would be an enlightening discussion.”

“For all that I can collect, it seems that your common interest is not limited to one course.” Edouard observed delightfully. “If I’m not mistaken, Hadrian here is sharing no less than five courses with you, Tom. Now, isn’t that wonderful news for the tired ears?”

“Class dismissed!” cried Slughorn. “Cork your elixirs! Precious concoctions they are, if brewed correctly, that is! Should I have the Ravenclaws take a sip during the midterm exam period, Ha! Ha!”

“Exactly the kind of news I like to hear, indeed, Edouard.” Tom turned to the boy. “Hadrian, my friend. It looks like we have Herbology up next. Follow me, if you may. I must admit I quite like the idea of getting accustomed to a desk mate who shares similar interests and taste in the many affairs of life.”

Evans looked murderous.

Avoiding the teenaged Dark Lord proved to be a harder task than Harry had imagined.

Of course, there was a certain amount of challenge to be expected when the pursuer was a certain sociopath named Tom Marvolo Riddle, but even so, this was on a whole new different level of difficulty.

During their shared classes (of which they had in abundance), the other would be pursuing Harry like a starved hawk, prying him with endless questions which Harry found absolutely unnecessary, many of which landed him in a tight spot, such as inquiries about his wandcore – who asks for someone’s wandcore, anyway? – news about his village and such. Harry honestly felt like he was being pried apart, much like an open book to be read out loud; he felt way too helpless for his liking and yet, there was ultimately little he could do about it, but sit there and undergo the abuse like the mediocre country boy he was meant to portray.

But surely Riddle’s curiosity was unusual even for a sociopath? Harry did not understand the source of his interest as he was careful to play his part of a plain, uninteresting country boy and to that image he did justice; playing dumb was not particularly hard if one had Dudley for a cousin. Although, perhaps, admittedly, Harry had allowed himself escape the slightest sliver of anger, the tiniest detail which the sociopath might not have let slip half so easily, but it was nothing striking
enough to hold his attention like this!

The worst part was that Tom Riddle’s arm seemed to stretch far beyond the naked eye; when Riddle was preoccupied with other matters (of which Harry obviously held little interest), he did not find himself half as free as he would have otherwise expected. As if they were physical extensions of Riddle’s body, his cronies were always around to pester him with similarly inquisitive questions, which he was finding more and more difficult to brush off, and just at the right place to block his route to escape. And when all this was not set up in place, there always seemed to be eyes watching his every movement. Predatory eyes hidden deep in the tall grass. A sea of endless green.

Slytherin.

Oh, how he had wanted Gryffindor! where were the great people of valor, the simple folks who fought for true friendships? why was he here, deep within this hellhole, stuck in a pit of poisonous snakes with a deadly king viper for a leader? Just what did he do so wrong to deserve such treatment from the universe?

“You have ought to handle the Wiggenstree gently, otherwise the Bowtruckles will become irritated, though it seems, from my careful observations, that it is already a lost case.” said a most obnoxious Ravenclaw boy next to Harry, who, in their brief acquaintance, proved himself stuck-up and most impatient to find occasions to boaster.

Harry ignored him but took his advice when he noticed the small green creatures were biting his fingertip, drawing a trail of crimson.

He could feel the other boy scrutinizing him, with some curious amount of contempt, as the other kept on rolling his eyes at Harry’s every gesture. Despite his apparent dislike of him, however, the Ravenclaw was persistent on staying in close proximity to him since the beginning of class. However annoying his new companion proved to be, Harry welcomed his company infinitely more than that of Tom Riddle, whose dangerous attention was deviated for the time being, and Harry was more than grateful for it.

“Just who are you?” the Ravenclaw suddenly demanded.

“I don’t know how to answer to strange questions, sorry.” Harry said.

“Let me rephrase my question.” The boy said impatiently, in a manner one would address a person of inferior intelligence. “Who are you to sneak into Tom’s good books, when you’re just some poor country boy?”

“I am who I am.” Harry replied coldly, feeling his patience run sheet thin at the mention of the teenaged Dark Lord - why did people keep assuming he had wanted the other's attention, favor - whatever they called it? It. was. infuriating.

“You think you’re smart.” the boy sneered. “But I can tell there must be something about you that holds Tom’s attention… and yet I find nothing particularly outstanding about you – you are a mediocre student, with little conversation, even less character and no style.”

“If you are so curious on the matter,” Harry retorted. “then I suggest you go ask Riddle himself, as I find myself equally perplexed by his behavior.”

“You talk funny.”

“I’ll take that as a compliment, thanks.”
“You shouldn’t.” The boy said bluntly and seeing that Harry made no further attempt to make conversation, he pressed on. “Let’s have it the other way around, then; do you know who I am?”

Harry dug into his memory of their brief meeting. “Er – Anthony Spencer, was it?”

“That’s right. The very same Spencer in Spencer-Moon.” The boy said proudly, and paused to watch Harry’s reaction, clearly in expectation of some great recognition. “I am related to the Leonard Spencer-Moon, his nephew to be precise, not so closely related, but very closely bonded, if you must know. And I should wonder why I am talking to an ignorant country boy who knows not his very own Minister for Magic, but more confounded am I by the fact that a nobody like you should hold Tom’s favor and not I – why are you laughing?”

“It looks to me that you perfectly answered your own question, Spencer.” Harry said coolly, and the struck look on the Ravenclaw boy was more than invitation for him to elaborate. “Damn, and here I thought Ravenclaws were known for their intelligence – have you ever heard of this old saying, which states that it matters not what one is born into, but what they grow to be? Well, I think you make a fine example of the former and your uncle the latter.”

“You’re a strange boy who speaks of strange things he doesn’t even understand,” Spencer snapped. “I do not care which run-down town you come from, but your ignorance is beyond the product of your circumstances and more than proof of your conscientious lack of wit - in fact, I think wasted enough of my time talking to you.”

“Suit yourself,” said Harry, completely unfazed and relieved to have rid himself of unpleasant company; Riddle and his associates might be a case beyond him, but Spencer’s retreat was a small feat he was glad for.

Then, in a sudden moment of realization, Harry whipped around, with unmeasurable speed, to find Riddle standing nearby, pensive, stroking his Wiggenstree with the strangest expression.

It was right there, etched on his pale handsome face; the ghost of a smile still stretched upon freshly wet-licked lips. His dark hazel eyes shone with the brilliance of a vivid moment of joy, and laughter was ringing softly in the air, but the sound had never escaped his lips.

Harry suppressed a shudder.

Chapter End Notes

Creepy Tom is so fun to write lol. Well, more creepiness to go in the upcoming update, woo! and a new character to look out for ;)
Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

HiIHiI this chapter took longer than I expected because something unexpected happened :) somehow I became sick with the flu (still am) despite it being like 30 degrees out there. MAGIC.

Anyway this will be the last or before last update before school starts, and therefore my updates will be less frequent and more irregular (sorry, but education IS important) ://// also can't believe summer is almost over sniff sniff

I hope you guys enjoy chapter 5~

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tom drank in the flickering of Evans’ character with much delight.

When the boy thought he was not looking, Evans would unconsciously regain bits of his true self; his natural countenance shone through with remarkable confidence in his posture and his character was revealed though his surprisingly sharp tongue (his comeback with Spencer was quite enjoyable). And whenever he suspected of Tom’s attention on him, he would immediately slump his posture into a meek persona, boring and plain; blending into the background.

It was so inconsistent it was laughable.

Had he mentioned that Hadrian Evans was a terrible actor for a Slytherin?

Yet, the majority of his party was already growing dismissive of the newcomer, disappointed in the apparent lack of character, and disapproving of the deficiency of his abilities, and to this latter remark Mulciber in particular was most vocal.

His other associates, though not as explicit in their disdain for Evans, agreed eagerly with Mulciber, and instead found much intrigue in their leader’s conduct, as it was not difficult to guess the subject of their furious murmuring upon his turned back; a scathing look had them all under an obedient silence.

Tom’s thoughts, however, were otherwise much occupied by Evans’ character to pay further notice to that of his associates.

Tom watched, attentively, as Evans struggled to perform the Hover Charm, a spell classified easy even in the school curriculum’s inferior standards. The boy winced at his own failure, scratching the back of his head, and letting out a frustrated groan.

It was too pathetic to be realistic; even a squib could fare better.

They were revising O.W.L level charms as a warm-up before tackling on to N.E.W.T.s level spells, and the boy’s performance was atrocious to say the least… to a suspicious extent, and Tom suspected Evans was aware of this, for somehow, miraculously, on the eleventh or twelfth try, Evans always managed to cast them impeccably.
“Hadrian,” he advanced slowly toward the boy, and delighted in the immediate step Hadrian Evans took backwards, alarmed. “It seems that our syllabus has proven itself rather challenging. As your prefect, I would like to offer my assistance in any way helpful should you encounter any difficulties.”

“I think I got the hang of it, actually.” Evans said, his tone turning duller as he approached, and his gaze lowered to avoid eye confrontation. “Just requires a little practice, is all.”

“Let’s see it, then.” He urged the other politely.

Evans shrugged compliantly – slumping slightly in obedience, another compliant gesture of an inferior incompetent, but seeing it otherwise acted out was unnatural. “fine – Wingardium Leviosa!”

Again; perfect posture, incantation and impeccable wand work – it all came so naturally, as if the boy had never had trouble executing the spell in the first place, and amidst the fluidity of the movement, concealment fell short - a spark of true character that shone through.

His thoughts were, once again, confirmed.

Evans was drawing an incompetent picture of his own persona, but what Tom repetitively failed to understand was the reason behind this concealment.

Slytherins were, by nature, ambitious creatures, deceptive and boasting if they had to be, to secure their place in the hierarchy, and Hadrian Evans’ standing was by no means impressive, and that this should be intended was very suspicious indeed.

Oftener than not, it was those very people who possessed deficiencies that were most prone to boast to make up for the lack of it, and the more accomplished simply carried their superiority in their countenance. This left those who did possess deadly secrets, however, were ones to hide and conceal; and made the most interesting minority.

“Your improvement is stunning.” Tom remarked softly, before placing a hand on Evans’ shoulder, earning a delightful flinch.

Ah, and this. Tom licked his lips. The boy’s physical response to him was truly intriguing… tempting, too, but he had more than enough time ahead of him to play with it.

“Thank you,” Evans returned meekly, but all the concealment in his posture cannot hide the tension popping in his jaw every time Tom complimented him.

“However, there is something rather curious about your performance.” He whispered softly, his fingers dancing away from the boy’s tense figure, and he starting pacing around the boy in slow steps, like a vulture circling upon a delicious prey.

“What would that be?” the boy asked with civil politeness, but Tom could detect a minute release of impatience in his tone.

“I am very much intrigued by your feigning incompetence,” he started silkily, eyes burning into emerald, watching the stunning eyes snap to him, startled. “Pray, tell me what is the purpose for such behavior? I am quite at loss, for I do not see any advantage for such acting, if not in itself an attempt to recommend yourself, for by reveal of true potential, your apparent improvement is misunderstood as genius-like. While I find your search for attention quite adorable, it really is so sly an art, though, I should expect no less of a Slytherin.” He winked playfully.

Evans was baffled - infuriated by this accusation. “I’m not desperate enough to resort to such
deceptions, and I can assure you that unlike your little followers, I do not seek your attention –” but he halted there, not daring to finish his statement, realizing his outburst a terrible mistake.

Such a cute little lion cub; it would be fun to tame one.

“Yes?” Tom said smoothly, watching the emerald eyes dance to life, fascinated. “I’m listening, Hadrian, please go on.”

“Nothing.” Evans gulped, managing to contain his anger, his tense posture collapsing into submission.

“Oh, it was most definitely not nothing.” Tom continued, eagerly, stopping in his pacing, drawing the other’s attention. “You see, I am faulted to a degree, to take pleasure in teasing my companions knowing that such humor is not often as well appreciated on the receiving end. However, your reaction is beyond remarkable; I have been suspecting it for a while, but now I am quite convinced;” he spoke suavely, his lips lingering close to the boy’s ears. “you hold an inexplicable contempt for me, one which I find as interesting as it is unjustified, for I do not see what I have done to deserve such animosity, unless… you should enlighten me on the subject?”

This seemed to anger Evans even more. “Not everything revolves around you, Tom Riddle, not everything.” he practically hissed.

The little lion cub tendencies were merging with the silhouette of a serpent. It was almost adorable.

“I never claimed so,” he laughed musically, the magical notes barely touching the softness of a whisper. “Oh – and I was just getting there, Hadrian; I am amazed by your ability for assumption… particularly in regard to my character; you have this image, this idea of me… or perhaps you do know me and let us suppose for now that you do. Yet, for someone who possesses such profound knowledge of my character, you are blinded by your prejudice … and I don’t know where you get such… inspirations. It’s truly a curious affair altogether, and believe me, I do intend to get to the end of it. It’s only a matter of time.”

Evans spluttered, before staring at him, green eyes blurred, enraged, conflicted, scared. It was beautiful. “What do you want, Riddle?” the boy finally snapped, out of genuine exasperation, but in a more desperate attempt to change the subject.

This could do.

“I simply want to know you better, Hadrian.” He replied, sweet as the heavens. “I want us to be friends, let go whatever misunderstanding there was between us; surely this is not too much of a favor to ask from your prefect?”

“No thanks.” Evans said, always keen on evading his offers. That would have to change. “If harassment comes along the commitment, then I want no part of it.”

“I agree with you, Hadrian, there is much philosophy in what you say.” This seemed to surprise Evans, as if not expecting his agreement to come so easily. He failed to notice this was all part of his plan. “And after our insightful conversation, I think we should come to an agreement -”

“- that you stop harassing me –“

“-very well;” he said, just as pleasantly. “As promised, I shall leave you to your own devices. In return, I would much be delighted by a reacquaintance over supper and to this occasion I intend to rekindle our friendship over pleasant company and conversation. Join me and my associates, tonight at 7, how about it?”
Evans hesitated, considering the options laid before him. A color of dread tinted his complexion to an ashen shade; the other’s confliction was apparent through his tight expression, and like this the boy much resembled a wild animal, cornered, conflicted, and under such unnatural confinement, unpredictable and impulsive.

“Fine.”

“Perfect,” Tom flashed a smile, meaning every muscle of it. “Then it’s an agreement, Hadrian. I’ll see you tonight; don’t be late.”

He left the boy before he could have time to digest the situation in a whole, and refute his decision, if it was considered a ‘consensual agreement’ at all.

Tom laughed at the mental image of Evans’ baffled expression in realization of his being frauded and fought the strong urge to turn around and witness the sight himself. Despite his minor disappointment, Tom was pleased by the present state of affairs, more so by the second; Evans’ entry into the Slytherins’ company would force the boy to play across the chess board, on which Tom would have more than sufficient opportunity to observe. And he would know just the right strings to pull the boy into his game.

It would be an easy success.

~*~

Harry was in big trouble.

He had just made a pact with the devil, quite literally, without realizing what he had gotten himself into, until it was all over - until it was too late – just what was he thinking?!

Why couldn’t he, for once in his life, just shut up, bend his neck and take it? Why did he always have to be hot-headed and ruin everything?

Dinner with the Slytherins.

Harry winced at the thought. As if Riddle was not distracting enough, now he had to deal with a bunch of baby Death Eaters.

Things could go wrong in so many ways.

Harry was in big, big trouble.

True to his words, however, Riddle did not bother him for the remainder of the day, and this brought Harry a momentary relief, only to discover that this could as well be due to the fact that they shared no classes in the afternoon!

He retreated to the Library during his Free Period, in a pitiful effort to cool his head and recollect his composure. At length he resolved to pay another visit to the Kitchens where he felt his spirits lift considerably after conversing with the sweet-tempered House Elves.

He then settled for a lonely one-man picnic in the Room of Requirement.

Within the four walls of the enchanted room, Harry was confined to a privacy that he found both soothing and painful; he was reminded immensely of his fifth year, where he and the DA had stood behind these same stoned magical fortifications against Umbridge’s dictating empire, only that this time, he was truly alone against the great force of time – outside this room were faceless
students of the past, staring back at him with indifference, the space stretching between them beyond an eternal distance…

And perhaps that was why, Harry contemplated an hour later, he was registered in History of Magic – it was certainly Dumbledore’s not-so-funny attempt at humor (really not funny), or perhaps was it amongst the less popular courses which had spaces to be spared, despite being a few days into the semester already.

That class, Harry found himself staring, for the hundredth time, at Professor Binns’ very solid figure, divided between amusement and disappointment, as he could no longer see the board through his head.

This major detail aside, there was little difference with the History of Magic course that Harry had known fifty years in the future; Professor Binns spoke in the usual flat, drone-like tone and his voice seemed to carry an impressive ability to instantly turn anyone into a profound state of drowsiness.

Next to him, a Slytherin girl seemed immune to this effect.

Harry watched her curiously.

She sat up straight, listening to Mr. Binns’ mumbling, and nodded enthusiastically, as if listening to a well told story. At intervals she scribbled notes down in a tidy scrawl, and busied herself with keeping up her color-coded scheme, turning her notebook into a burst of vivid pigments.

There was something about her countenance – her straight back and chin up with painted alertness – that brought a genuine, passionate quality to her enthusiasm, of one who valued knowledge, which reminded him instantly of Hermione.

Consistent to this resemblance, her suitcase was heavy with textbooks and thick extracurricular volumes and novels, amongst which, Harry found a very familiar title.

*Pride and Prejudice, by Jane Austen*

Harry did not realize he had uttered this out loud, until the Slytherin girl turned toward him, and eyed him with a guarded expression.

“Er – I did not mean to startle you,” Harry said rather awkwardly. “It’s just that this particular book has caught my attention.”

“I suppose it would.” She said with caution, rather defensively, though not coldly. “It is not known by many, for it is a muggle lady’s work, but I find it brilliantly written.”

“Though *I* have never read it, I can certainly account for its brilliance, because it’s a book which my best friend was most fond of, and I have confidence in her taste.”

“Then your friend must have lovely taste, indeed!” she said in a friendlier tone. “I love to read in my leisure time, and this book has offered a magic of its own! And though it is written some hundred years ago, its contents is still of modern importance, especially regarding women’s issues; It is truly a thrilling read and the authoress’ genius grows with every turn of the page!”

“I don’t doubt it; my friend shares the exact same opinion.” He told her sincerely.

She warmed up considerably to him after this statement.

“my name is Rose Landry,” she told him shortly after. “and you must be the new transfer student
they keep talking about!”

She was a slender girl with very pretty features; her hair shimmered of a golden blonde, twisting in soft wavy curls and her eyes of a dazzling brilliance that was difficult to forget. There was much charm in her words, and the liveliness of her spirits was contagious, such that Tom Riddle soon became a vague subject in the back of his mind.

“So I was just going to ask you, Hadrian - ”

“Hadrian makes me sound so old,” he said. “please call me Harry,”

“You’re so funny!” she laughed. “So, Harry, how are you finding Hogwarts so far?”

“I think it’s beautiful,” he told her.

“Isn’t it?” she said with wonder. “I still remember my first day here; I was… simply in a daze – the breathtaking architecture, the infinite collections of books, the knowledge - the magic!” she resumed after a brief pause. “Harry, it is amongst my deepest wishes that Hogwarts should provide you the comfort and necessities that a home would offer… after all, with your hometown destroyed… Harry, I’m very sorry about what happened to your Godfather. I’m sure he was a wonderful man.”

Harry was greatly taken aback by this, not by what she said, but rather by the fact that she was informed of this particular fact.

He, of all people, knew the speed at which news could travel at Hogwarts, but the knowledge that it had been Tom Riddle who spread them in the first place flared a foreign, fiery emotion within him; he felt as if greatly betrayed… yet, what did he expect?

But Harry’s anger did not last for long. Talking to Rose was a refreshing, almost therapeutic experience.

Harry figured within the next few minutes of conversing with that she was a Slytherin Prefect. This piece of intelligence came to Harry as pleasant as it was un-shocking; Rose Landry proved to be a very engaging and talented young lady, who possessed more than just charm to appeal to her listeners; and this led Harry to marvel at how he had found her sitting alone in the first place…

Before he could give a further thought on the subject, there came the inevitable subject of Tom Riddle.

“I saw you with Riddle in class this morning.” Rose said suddenly, watching Harry’s reaction carefully. “Are the two of you good friends?”

“No,” was Harry’s immediate answer, but finding his blunt response prone to raising suspicions, he rushed to correct himself. “I mean, I’d rather say that we’re on the level of acquaintances.”

There was a slight pause, and Harry suspected Rose might have caught the sliver of disgust that had briefly escaped his lips, but she merely said, “Oh - I suppose had the wrong idea, then, though I had the distinct impression that he was being very amicable with you this morning.”

“Really?”

“Really,”

“Oh, okay.” said Harry rather nonchalantly.
“Look, Harry – you’re new, so you don’t know how many people long to be in your place – to sit next to Tom Riddle is considered the greatest privilege by the majority of Hogwarts’ population.”

The image of Anthony Spencer coming particularly to mind.

“But not by you,” he ventured.

“No, not me.” Rose said rather coolly. She then casted a brief look at their surroundings before whispering. “In fact, I think people should stand up to him and his horrible cronies.”

“Brilliant,” said Harry, grinning.

Rose returned a lovely smirk. “And I must express my delight at your indifference in Riddle, though I am sorry I cannot say the same for the latter; It seems to me that he has quite the interest in you – surely you have noticed his fixation on you during your common classes?”

“I did notice that his attentions were rather imposing,” Harry admitted. “But likely my novelty has something to do with it.”

“No, Harry, it does not.” Rose said slowly, emphasizing on every word. “Tom Riddle – he’s all smiles and friendliness on the surface, but in reality, he’s an elitist who would never associate with people of little consequence to him.”

“As one would expect of a true Slytherin,” Harry commented rather drily. “but no matter how I think about it, I cannot imagine what advantage I am to him. You see, I’m not exactly in great possession of money or influence being a recent war orphan.”

Rose looked at him sadly. “Don’t say that, Harry. You are plenty worthy, more so in character than in social standing, unconventional to Riddle’s usual objects of pursuit, and I dare say this further appeals him, for he is in search of refreshing entertainment.”

“Must feel great to be an object of entertainment.”

“I assure you we girls have it oftener worse.” She said sympathetically. “In your case, I think that there is little you can do, but to proceed with caution, and very crucially, act natural without overexerting your talents in Riddle’s presence; do not give him reason to have further interest in you.”

“Understood,” Harry said gratefully, touched by her genuine concern for a stranger she had just acquainted with. “I’ll keep your words in mind.”

There was a newfound bounce to Rose’s steps as they marched their way toward supper. Harry too, felt his spirits lifted by the prospect of finding an ally in this alienated version of Hogwarts, or, more hopefully, a loyal friend.

Harry’s stomach was growling by the time they had reached the Great Hall, a less-than-friendly reminder that he had not visited the dining hall since the previous night.

But as soon as their green robes were sweeping along their long dining table, Harry noticed that Slytherins of all years were eyeing them with the strangest expression.

Upon closer inspection, Harry realized that the staring – glaring, in fact – was directed at Rose, and Rose alone.

This came to Harry as a shock, and at first, he blamed his wild imagination, yet there was no denying the truth, as the evidence was laid open to him so plainly. Nonetheless Harry was
confounded; he had expected flocks of boys melting at her sight, lining up for the chance to talk to her and mesmerize at her multicolored eyes…

“Ooooh,” cooed an obscenely high-pitched voice next to them. It belonged to a pug-faced girl bearing an uncanny resemblance to Pansy Parkinson. “If it isn’t little missy perfect and – oh my, the new boy! Always quick to make a move, aren’t you, Landry?”

Rose ignored her with an air of dignity.

Harry gaped, despite himself, at the absolute lack of respect in the tone she addressed his companion.

“Unfortunately, as much as we are aware of the mean arts she employs to commend herself,” said the second girl, clearly in response to Harry’s struck expression. “clearly, her numerous subjects are not so lucky as to be enlightened on the matter.”

“Not indefinitely, it appears, for there is a curious withdrawal amongst these young men, which confirms my belief that traits, no matter how well concealed by their possessor, always find their way to the light.” said a third girl, whose awful smirk reminded Harry of the likes of Goyle and Crabbe.

“Don’t get us wrong, honey, we’re only looking out for you,” said the first girl, whose raw expression bore no trace of kindness.

“I don’t mean to sound rude, but how about you mind your own business and we mind ours?” Harry said to her, who in some way appeared to be the leader of the group.

This seemed to agitate the girls, as they whispered furiously amongst themselves.

“I’d be more careful if I were you, Honey.” she finally said. Happy to be the one to have the finishing word, she added with a satisfactory smirk. “Once your hands get dirty, it takes more than a cleaning spell to wash them off!”

Harry shrugged unaffectedly, and dived his fork into the nearest plate.

“Are you surprised?” Rose said after a moment’s silence.

Harry was going to say yes, but he could feel they were touching a sensitive topic, “surprised about what?”

“That I’m a Muggleborn,” she said proudly.

Realization hit him like a Bludger. His thoughts were spinning backwards - this seemed to explain – *everything*… from Rose was sitting alone in the corner to the reason why Slytherins were avoiding her like the plague, and from her Muggle book to the very reason she opposed Tom Riddle…

“You must think it’s ironic,” she laughed humorlessly. “a Muggleborn sorted in Slytherin, the House named after the very founder who detested us in the first place! Merlin knows what the Sorting Hat had in mind!”

“Muggleborns are just as capable in terms of magical abilities as Purebloods and Halfbloods.” Harry said. “Maybe you’re here to prove that.”

The next moment he found himself lost in a pool of floral scented golden locks, before Rose freed him and Harry could breathe again.
“Oh, Harry! You are so sweet!” she exclaimed. “If you truly meant what you said, then I must be so very lucky to encounter someone of such sweet manners, superior kindness and goodness!”

Harry protested that she was being too generous in her description of him.

“You may think that I’m overstating,” she retorted. “but you don’t know how many people have left me the second I speak of my blood status – and those who are less prejudiced, are so overwhelmed by my unpopularity that they have left long before the revelation!”

“such weak-minded and weak-willed people are undeserving of your company.” Harry said indignantly.

Rose regarded him with affection. “And that is further proof of your superior strength of character and overall goodness!”

Harry, in return, felt a warm surge of sympathy and understanding for his beautiful companion.

His entire life with the Dursleys was a similar case of isolation, in addition to his fifth year of Hogwarts where everyone believed him a liar or a tragic case to be treated at the asylum, but once again he had always had Hermione and Ron to have his back, no matter what other people thought of him. He could not imagine the solitude that Rose must have gone through in Slytherin - a stranger in her very own House.

Suddenly Rose grew silent and her posture alarmingly.

Instinctively, Harry looked around them to discover that several heads were turned toward the front of the Great Hall, where a group of Slytherin boys had just entered the Great Hall – it was Tom Riddle, followed by Edouard Rosier, Benedict Mulciber, Randalph Lestrange and Atticus Avery.

the four tables emerged into a deafening moment of shared silence, as if time itself was holding its breath. Upon the party’s approaching, the girls flushed with ecstasy at the endearing sight, and the boys regarded the party with no less amount of admiration, each imagining themselves one day part of that group, as distinguished members of some secret society, a belonging which they longed for, the image an unfeasible mirage, and in consequence, a greater foundation for longing.

Perhaps it was a trick of the light or a flicker of the enchanted candles; Harry was blinded for the slightest fraction of a second. When he recovered from the sudden brightness, he saw Tom Riddle breezing past him with indifference, expression foreboding no release of emotions – dangerous.

Edouard Rosier, far more amicable by contrast, winked in his direction.

The group of Slytherin girls from earlier squealed and gloated amidst the attention they insisted was reserved to them alone.

Riddle found a seat within the heart of a very important-looking crowd, and Harry could tell that amidst that group, he rose without doubt as most important, for though he was far from the eldest, all heads were turned in his way in search for his favor.

Suddenly Harry felt self-conscious; a burning feeling of shame overcame him, and he turned away at once.

He was not going be like the rest of the students and watch the devil-in-disguise in awe and he was not going crave Riddle’s attention – just no.

He turned back to Rose.
“Looks like you had to worry for nothing; he’s hasn’t got a tinge of interest left in me.”

“You’re very naïve if you truly believe that, Harry.” Rose said softly. “Tom Riddle’s attention span may function at a high rate, but once latched, his fixation persists until he tastes the satisfaction of stepping over his victim – it’s a game to him.”

“You seem to know a great deal about Riddle for someone who isn’t personally involved with him.” Harry observed softly. “I think only his inner circle knows his character better than you.”

“The one and only perk of being at the very bottom of the social ladder is that the truth speaks to you directly – whether one likes it or not.”

“You can’t be at the bottom – I mean, come on, you’re a prefect!” Harry reasoned.

“That is not how things work in Slytherin politics, unfortunately.” She told him. “Muggleborns are not highly looked upon and are commonly regarded as undeserving of higher recognition and responsibility; in consequence, we make an easy target for heavy criticism.”

“That is very unfair,” Harry said indignantly. “They just want to find a reason to fault you, even if it is all goodness.”

Quite correct.” Rose agreed. “And most resolute of them all is Riddle, who hates me with a great passion.”

“I know that Riddle is prejudiced, but I had thought that he had respect for anyone who proved themselves talented.”

“I have yet to see that, and while the idea is quite appealing, it does not tempt me. I am not sorry, nor at loss to unfit his fancy; there is nothing honorable in associating with him and his cause.”

Harry hummed, but he thought privately that Rose’s bitter tone indicated some deeper form of disagreement than a simple case of natural clash. Perhaps their mutual dislike of one another was more personal than she had let on.

“But you guys are prefects, surely you ought to be at least civilly friendly to each other?”

“All the more reason for him to hate me; not unlike his followers, Riddle does not like his conventional image of Muggleborns to be shattered. You can quite get the idea if sitting with me is reason enough for him to brush you off, though I am confident that he is eager to seek you out again should the opportunity present you to him.”

“Actually, about that,” Harry started hesitantly, and the uneasy feeling in his gut that accompanied him to supper compelled him to spill his confrontation with Riddle in Charms class.

Rose reacted to this news most agitatedly. “Oh, but Harry! You should have told me earlier – this is very bad news indeed! If you were under the impression that I was insistent on keeping you, then you must have known that I am perfectly fine on my own!”

“Honestly, it just- slipped my mind? It was very fun talking to you, Rose, and I simply forgotten about it…”

“That is very sweet of you, Harry, but this is not a matter to take lightly; if there is anything worse than making a deal with Riddle, it’s breaking them. Riddle is not known for his being merciful, and I doubt that my accompanying you in his stead should soften the blow.” she then continued, in a more composed voice. “But I do not see what we can attempt at present to mend it, for what is
“Well,” Harry concluded with greater unease. “That puts the both of us in a terrible place, doesn’t it?”

“You’re quite right,” Rose said, and her bright eyes turned into a most vivid blue, deep like the ocean, capturing him in a moment of reverie. “We may not be in great standing, but my mother always said that a good friend is the greatest gift in a time of crisis.”

Harry smiled back.

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In consequence of Evans’ intended failure to join their company, the discussion of Hadrian Evans’ character reached its height at the Slytherin table and remained a subject yet to exhaust itself throughout the stretch of the evening. Not all the intrigue of his new and unusual persona could save him from the abuse of Mulciber and the majority of his inner circle, who, rather amusingly, appeared exceedingly gleeful at his absence despite their venting him for it in the first place.

“We lose nothing in his absence,” Mulciber stated firmly, content for his opinion to be shared by the majority, though Tom’s silence held him much in dissatisfaction. “for Hadrian Evans is one of those young men who fail to realize what is good for them, and such ignorance renders them generally ungrateful for kindness; and nothing is kindness if not our leader’s generous offer of acquaintance.”

“Good riddance.” Grunted Avery, always one to summarize such elaborate expressions into simple words.

“There is little to be lost on our side, and much to lose for him.” Abraxas Malfoy said in agreement, and he entailed with much elaboration. “and such a foolish discard of opportunity and privilege on his part marks the result of poor breeding. In light of recent events, my father was kind enough to inform me of Mr. Evans’ hometown being amongst those highly associated with Muggles, and the encouraged coexistence between the two has been quite exceedingly infamous as to catch Grindelwald’s attention.”

“And perhaps the boy’s frequent presence amongst Muggles has grown him quite numb to their stench.” Randolph Lestrange’s dark hooded eyes pointed to Rose Landry, who was chatting animatedly with the boy in question.

“Oh, no doubt of it!” Penelope Nott added quickly, the subject of Rose Landry always one to capture her interest and involvement. “And I dare say that the poor boy is much too engrossed with the little Mudblood to pay attention to us; one cannot truly blame the poor boy, for so many before him have been taken in by her allure.”

Her audience murmured agreeably to this remark.

Tom contemplated in his silence with much amusement, in the curiosity that was Hadrian Evans’ painted picture, though not due to the deficiency in his associates’ ability to observe beyond the convenience and limitations of their prejudices, but in the boy’s effortless ability to avoid attention. It was curious that despite his move being as bold as it was offending, his associates were so dismissive of the boy as to shift their attention to his Mudblood friend, who was now the prime culprit for his actions.

Unluckily for Evans, however, Tom was not so lenient as to disregard such impertinence, so much so that it was a fatal mistake on Evans’ part; it would have been infinitely more prudent if the boy
had avoided interaction altogether, as he had attempted in his isolation at first, but now, there was no denying that Evans had chosen a side within Slytherin’s very political climate, and he dare say the boy had possessed a side regardless of Rose Landry’s influence, and it was this common ground which lead to her company being so warmly received and not contrariwise.

This piece of intelligence seemed to fit perfectly with Tom’s assumption that the boy somehow knew Tom prior to their first impressions. Evans’ hatred of him was deep rooted enough for him to explode at the slightest confrontation, and well-founded enough to prompt Evans to conceal his persona to avoid detection of possessing profound knowledge of Tom’s character. Knowledge which only the highest esteemed amongst his inner circle were to witness. There was no way Hadrian Evans was well-connected enough to obtain such rare intelligence, and this led to one truth: Hadrian Evans knew Tom Riddle very well, through means beyond the normal.

Though there were still several pieces missing to complete the puzzle, his thoughts seemed now significantly less far-fetched than before, for his theory was now strengthened with thicker foundation, waiting to be built onto by further observations.

All the pleasantness of his improved study of the boy’s character, however, could not overcome his fury at his breaking of their agreement. Unacceptable. There was nothing more intolerable than disobedience. He would have to teach the boy a lesson, no doubt of it; a punishment befitting of his insolence.

Always one to enjoy more refined forms of cruelty, Tom hungered to witness the look of utter defeat in those defiant green eyes. The mere thought of the various possibilities to tame the otherwise elusive, almost wild-tempered boy into submission ran a pleasant rush through his skin, and the accompanying picture of Evans succumbing to his knees, begging and yearning for his favor, incapable of living without Tom’s attention, was a truly exhilarating feast, and upon this, such a fate was brought upon the boy.

After all, Evans had made his move, and it was Tom’s turn to take a further step into the game, a deciding move, one of which careful observations would serve the lever for success.

*Challenge accepted.*

Chapter End Notes

the story is finally starting to go somewhere yayyy

I hope you guys liked Rose because she is going to, inevitably, play an important role in the story~

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