

Prodigium

By: Shivani/Grazhir

Pairings: Gen

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Spoilers: Contains canon elements and events, but does not use canon as a rigid framework

Warnings: Character deaths, super!Harry, very OOC!Harry due to circumstances, nasty habits, OOC-ness, implied rape

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Summary: There's a reason why Harry survived that night, and it wasn't due to Lily's love. What saves Harry becomes inextricably entwined with him, and greatly influences how the story unfolds and the person Harry becomes.

Notes: Prodigium -i n. [a prodigy, portent; an enormity, an unnatural thing; a monster].

This story contains shades of Japan, but not in the manner most people do. And, though I've only just actually started writing this, I can tell it's going to contain a fairly unemotional Harry, who is rather blasé about a lot of things. Also, I'm writing this mostly for my own amusement, so I can certainly understand if some people look at it and go "Bwuh?" and think it's uncharacteristic of my usual work.

The beginning is kind of an overload of information to set things up, and time skipping is in effect. It's also not very deep.

The only way a pairing for Harry could happen would be in a sequel, and it'd be slash.

1 : THIS

He had been wandering for a very long time, ever since he had been chased out of his home country by the wizards there. Since then he had traveled west, sticking around and dealing with his curse (though he had to admit, it was not something he actually loathed) until chased out or he became bored (not all communities could even recognize what he was to force him to leave), until finally he came to exist in the United Kingdom. Much like in most other countries, magical denizens tended to cluster together, away from the normal humans, and he spent much time acquiring new knowledge as best he could under the constraints he suffered.

It so happened that on the night of Halloween in the year 1981 he was tailing a certain man who went by the name of Lord Voldemort, a 'dark lord' who amused and interested him. He trailed along behind as the man and one minion approached a normal enough looking house in a village, and inside, where the man of the house (he must assume, anyway) was brutally murdered as the female fled upstairs.

He did wonder why they had no other way to escape the invasion, but asking was out of the question. After a longing look at the corpse sprawled on the floor he proceeded upstairs and watched as the female pleaded with Voldemort and was then struck down. It was then that he could no longer contain his urges and moved toward the woman, ending up between Voldemort and a child (presumably the offspring of the two humans just killed), and it was then that Voldemort produced another killing green light.

It, amazingly, partly passed through him, and two things happened almost simultaneously. The child's soul was ejected from its body as the majority of the curse was reflected back at Voldemort (not that he saw that at first, being too focused on the child). Even as it entered his mind that he would be eating well that night he was pushed forward by the spell, plowing into the child's soul, with both it and him lodging back in the child's body. Reoriented and now looking out through physical eyes he saw that Voldemort was disintegrating. Moments after Voldemort was gone, all but his clothing and magical focus, the minion stopped panicking long enough to grab the focus and flee, and he found that he was being drawn down into unconsciousness, a state he could barely even remember given how long he had existed.

Albus Dumbledore was a bit flustered on having been informed of an alarm regarding the Potter home, and had sent off one of his most loyal people, Rubeus Hagrid, to investigate. He hurried to Hogwarts after alerting Madam Pomfrey that her services were most likely needed, and waited, impatiently, in the infirmary, wondering if he had been correct in his actions. Still, Hagrid was generally reliable, and his status as a half-giant afforded him certain advantages in life. He would also follow orders, something many had difficulties with.

Hagrid arrived after what seemed like forever, carrying only one: Harry Potter. Albus listened in a somewhat distracted manner as Hagrid spoke of having met Sirius Black and being given the use of the man's enchanted motorcycle, and how it was that James and Lily were dead,

James in the ground floor living room and Lily upstairs in the nursery. A part of him grieved greatly that neither had been sensible enough to make use of an emergency portkey, but he supposed that if Voldemort had indeed attacked, such a thing was enough to make even the most stalwart panic. He would, naturally, go there himself just as soon as Poppy had checked little Harry over; Hagrid was dismissed for the time being.

Madam Pomfrey completed her scans and turned to him with an expression of grave concern. “Albus, he is healthy enough considering, but it looks as though he has no magic left. And I’m greatly surprised he has not awoken, not even with all this noise, even briefly.”

Albus glanced at the child curiously, then shook his head. “I would not doubt that whatever happened has caused him magical exhaustion. It will surely correct itself in the usual manner.” He ignored the worried shake of her head and continued, “I must go to the Potter home now that he is safely under your watchful eye. I must see for myself what has occurred and handle what I can.” With that he was away.

It was a simple enough matter (though profoundly saddening) to deal with the aftermath of the attack. He was known to certain inhabitants of Godric’s Hollow, and they easily deferred to his will. Aurors who had arrived were handling the muggle residents, so he entered the home, several aurors trying and failing to follow him. Albus was not the Secret Keeper, so he had no way of allowing them entrance. As such, it was up to him to begin the job of packing away the household so that he might deliver it to Gringotts to be stored in the Potter vault, and bringing the bodies of James and Lily outside.

The only peculiarity he found was in the nursery—the clothing of whom he presumed was Voldemort. Why it was there he could not accurately divine, but it was obvious he *had* been there; no other ever wore clothing of that style. Scans indicated that the killing curse had been used three times, though how Voldemort could have managed to miss Harry was a mystery. He came to the conclusion that not only was Harry truly the child of prophecy, but that Lily had somehow managed to save his life. Love could be a wondrous and mysterious force. That the child came through the experience relatively unscathed was good.

Back at Hogwarts Poppy was insistent that she keep the child for at least a day to ensure he would be all right, a demand Albus acceded to, and when it was plain that aside from the child still not waking he was well, Albus arranged to move the child to his new home, with the only living relatives he was aware of: the Dursleys.

Petunia Dursley woke and yawned, feeling entirely dragged out. Even though her precious Dudley was old enough to sleep through the night he was still a very demanding child, and she often felt worn out. She carefully made her way downstairs and opened the front door, intent on getting the paper and that morning’s milk, when she noticed a basket containing a bundle and letter. Petunia frowned and gathered everything up, having trouble juggling things, and went to the kitchen. The paper was placed near Vernon’s usual spot and the milk was placed

in the refrigerator, at which time she picked up the strange letter and opened it, then began to read.

Her screams brought Vernon downstairs in a rush. Eventually the basket with her freak nephew was shoved into the cupboard under the stairs to get him out of sight and out of mind, though she did find it peculiar that the child had not awoken. Petunia passed that off as having something to do with his freakish nature. It was not until several days later, having given the child minimal care, that the boy awoke, and it was then that she felt fear more than anger.

When Harry finally awoke he was a very hungry little boy, and he was also a very changed little boy. His mind had been drastically altered and evolved as a result of that night and the forced unconsciousness, and was now a melding of human and something demonic. While not having two consciousnesses, he had become an adult in a child's body thanks to the lifetimes of experience of the being who had invaded and merged with him; he still thought of himself as Harry, though. That did not change the fact that he was extremely hungry, so he was relieved when his wails brought about a change to the darkness he existed in and a person appeared, though upset that this was not his mother.

The woman looked at him distastefully before removing him from the container he laid in and marched off to another room, unceremoniously dumping him on the table in order to fetch food for him. For a normal child of his age he might not have had many options to protest this treatment, but he was hardly a normal child. "What are you doing?"

The woman let out a shriek and swiftly turned around, staring at him in horror.

"I am very hungry, whoever you are. You will remedy this quickly."

The woman fainted, which greatly annoyed him, and he was forced to wait until she awoke and dragged herself back up, casting a fearful and puzzled look in his direction before fetching a jar of pureed fruit and a small spoon. Harry was not impressed, as he had been eating more like his parents, but did not then protest. Once he had been placed in a high chair he ripped the spoon from the woman's grasp and proceeded to feed himself. The moment the jar was empty he said, "More."

She scurried off and quickly returned with another open jar, shifting restlessly as he consumed that one as well. When he did finally feel full he asked, "Who are you and where are my parents?"

Loud wailing interrupted and she looked anxiously toward one of the doors, then swiftly left. A short time later she had returned with a still wailing large child. Harry realized almost at once that he was seated where the other child would normally be and promptly slipped down onto the floor and hauled himself up onto one of the normal chairs.

The woman looked almost grateful for a moment and placed the child in the vacated seat, then rushed to get food for it. Harry waited to speak again until she began feeding the child (something Harry viewed as mildly disgusting considering that the child looked as though he was old enough to feed himself, and was making an unholy mess to boot) to repeat his question. She eventually identified herself as Petunia Dursley (and the child as her son Dudley), and that she was the sister of Harry's mother.

“Why am I here?”

He suffered through her attempts to explain while still managing to feed Dudley and recalled, after a moment of thought, that the green light had been the cause of his mother's death, and most likely that of his father. Petunia explained that there were no other relatives, though she had no idea when it came to his father's family. Someone by the name of Albus Dumbledore had left him on the doorstep sometime before her usual morning routine, and basically had terrified her with the letter he left, causing her to feel as though she had no choice but to keep him.

More questioning revealed why he had awoken in a small dark room instead of a place like the nursery, which angered him, and he resolved to explore the house thoroughly to find a better place to sleep. And, while his demon side was very knowledgeable about magical folk, he was not aware of any specific incantations, only that they usually used some kind of focus; Harry resolved to get around those issues.

His resolve was tested not long after when Petunia became complacent (or as much as she could be under the circumstances). Her fear ebbed and her anger returned, obvious when she said, “You're nothing but a freak! I'd not have you at all if it wasn't for the old man's threats. You'll take what little we give you and not complain, nor will you keep asking questions. Freaks don't deserve kindness. Try anything funny and you'll be severely punished.”

“Oh really?” he said, anger building up inside him. A moment later she screamed, though he could not discern why, and Harry thrust out his hand, a jet of red light streaking from it toward Petunia. She yelled in pain and snatched Dudley from his seat, then fled through one of the doors.

‘Guess I can do magic without those silly sticks,’ he thought, then slipped off the chair and set about exploring. ‘I wonder if the husband will have the same sort of reaction.’ The first floor held three bedrooms (one fitted as a nursery) and a spare room which appeared to be a playroom. ‘There's no reason for this and I am certainly not staying in a cupboard, so all of this will have to be moved.’

Focus and experimentation on his part soon saw the majority of the toys out in the hall for Petunia to deal with and the room itself cleared for occupancy. He might have considered the unoccupied bedroom, but it was decorated in a manner he found nauseating. For the time being he moved the basket to the room; he would persuade Petunia to remedy the lack of a bed shortly. He was concerned, however, for his safety. He might be able to defend himself

while awake, but what could happen to him while sleeping? That they had done nothing to harm him yet was probably only due to not needing to be cared for until just that day. Harry wasn't even sure how many days had gone by, as his original human mind had not been capable of things like keeping track, just like his human memories of the attack were fuzzy, whereas his demon side was but had not cared, though its memories of the event were fairly sharp.

Giving consideration to exactly that part of himself Harry decided to experiment further, and succeeded in transforming himself into mist, a form which was capable of floating just about anywhere, even through walls. He had not been certain he could now that his body was physical, but it presented an interesting idea, based on the demon's activities in the past. Harry promptly floated downstairs and located Petunia, then overlapped her, in the process copying relevant information from her mind, and felt little remorse when it disoriented her. A retreat upstairs and a shift of form back to one in the normal physical realm saw him sorting through his findings, then moving to retrieve the letter left by Albus Dumbledore.

Petunia was correct when saying Dumbledore had threatened them. He claimed that wards had been erected around their home as a result of their blood relationship, and would protect them against those who would seek to harm Harry and his only remaining relatives. Freaks, in other words. Should they choose not to heed his words he was confident that people would find out about their relationship and move to ensure that they would not live long. He then entreated them to regard Harry as a member of their family—Harry snorted at that—and raise him with love and care. The remainder was a mixture of threat and entreaty, and all of it was guaranteed to enrage persons who considered magical people as freaks and abominations.

Harry tucked the letter under the blanket in the basket and had a seat nearby. While he waited to see how Vernon took things he would take the time to go over the knowledge he held and think about ways to stave off any attempts against him by the Dursleys. He was jolted into full awareness hours later at Petunia's shrill cry of "Vernon!" and shifted to mist so he could join them (no normal human being capable of seeing him in that form) and watch.

Petunia spilled out her tale of woe, including an answer to what caused her fright ("His eyes—his eyes were glowing blood red, Vernon! He's possessed by the Devil! He can already do freaky stuff!"), and watched as Vernon blustered and shook a meaty fist, promising to "take care of the little freak" himself. Harry chose that time to exit the room, transform back, and reenter in physical form.

"You plan to do what?" he asked.

Vernon began blustering again, obviously confused that such a small child could speak so intelligently and intelligibly, then marched in his direction, fist cocked and ready to be used. Harry thrust out his hand again, this time with the conscious intent to harm, and flung more of that red light. Vernon bellowed as he stumbled back, landing heavily on his backside, and with the light of fear in his eyes.

“You will not attempt to harm me,” Harry stated flatly. “You will feed me properly, and you will purchase a bed for the room I have chosen.”

“You dare demand anything!” Vernon shouted.

“Do you wish to feel more pain?” he replied. “There is so much more I can do. Are you sure you really wish to feel the full extent of my power?”

Something caused Vernon to blanch—possibly his eyes had gone all funny again—and the man said nothing further.

“I am not particularly pleased to have to be here, either. Provide what I need promptly and otherwise stay out of my way. We’ll all be happier for it. Understood?” Once both Vernon and Petunia had nodded he slipped back out and up the stairs to his chosen room.

Things went well enough over the next few years. There had been attempts against him, such as when Vernon stealthily tried to attach numerous locks on the outside of his door. It was a failure, of course. But on the whole they gave him exactly what he demanded to have and tried to otherwise pretend he did not exist, nor did they ever actually speak to him. Petunia was often busy borrowing or returning books to the library, having been forced to acquire a library card, in order to keep up with Harry’s demands for them until he was old enough to do so personally.

His teachers at school quickly realized he was something of a genius, though he never outright admitted he had an eidetic memory, and alerted the Department for Education and Skills. They ensured that Harry was able to progress at his own rate rather than forcing him to be held to that of his age peers, thus enabling Harry to take his GCSEs at the tender age of ten, making perfect marks in twelve exams. He then began to study for his GCE A-levels.

During those years Harry came to learn that the alleged wards around No 4 Privet Drive were something of a joke. True, they did prevent anyone meaning harm from entering the actual property (though he felt they were excessively flawed due to the still held and unspoken attitudes of Vernon and Petunia—Dudley simply ignored him), but they did not prevent other people from hanging about.

Harry had been momentarily confused on seeing a figure dressed in a long black cloak or robe and wearing a white mask, but demonic memory provided an image of the person who had accompanied Voldemort on the night his parents had been killed. Therefore, he knew that whoever this person was they were not there for tea and cake. Rather, they were probably of a mind to murder him, and spying out an opportunity to do so. Having spent the past few years practicing a form of magic as much as other subjects, Harry was prepared to do something about it.

He managed to lure the person into the park as the sky was beginning to darken, and headed toward one of the areas with clusters of trees. Children playing were starting to head home or being retrieved by parents, so he felt confident that no one would witness what was shortly to happen. By the time the two of them were alone Harry was already under the canopy provided by the trees and the person was not far behind, having had to skulk in order to avoid being seen by 'normal' people, and he was able to ask a question before the person turned overtly threatening. "What are you?"

The person paused as he entered the shadow of the first tree. "I am one of my master's most loyal Death Eaters!" the person said fervently, recognizable as male given the voice itself. "He shall elevate me to greatness once it is known I have succeeded in killing you!"

"Oh really?" Harry responded, heartbeats before he thrust out his hand. It was the perfect time to try out some things he could envision, but had been unable to thus far due to lack of targets. He avoided the spells the man was sending his way by the on-the-spot expedient measure of misting, and sent his own spells out, his focus on what effects he wished to accomplish. Thus it was simple enough, relatively speaking, to break the man's bones and slice his flesh, until, after a strange dance of mist and light, his opponent was dead.

He laughed a little uneasily at having directly taken a life, but was broken from his thoughts at the sharp cracking sounds which were happening not all that far away. Fearful that magical folk had a way of sensing magic—at least that of the man he had just killed—Harry transformed to mist and engulfed the Death Eater, consuming him utterly. He remained in mist form—necessary to digest his meal—and waited to see what would happen from up in the canopy.

Four cloaked figures soon arrived, each of them very quiet, and each brought out a focus and began examining the area. Copious amounts of blood and blurred footprints abounded, but no other evidence aside from the residue of magic.

"There was definitely at least one killing curse cast here," one of them said quietly.

"But why? Even if the perpetrator disappeared when he heard us arriving, what about the target? This blood had to have come from someone," another said.

One stood up from where he had been examining the pattern of blood and said, "He could have taken the victim along, I suppose."

"Jensen, Twilfs, check and secure the perimeter," the first one said. "Markson, start photographing the area."

Harry continued to watch as they went about their business, feeling amused and relieved that none of them even bothered to look up, and eventually floated home to his room. It wasn't until the next morning that he returned to physical form, and by then he had rationalized the death as self-defense. The man certainly had not seemed willing to leave when it became clear

that Harry was no easy target, and if Harry had not killed him he might have been able to report his findings to others, something Harry could not allow.

He learned not long after a second Death Eater wandered into his territory and was consumed (before the man even had the chance to cast any spells) that he held the ability to change his appearance to match that of anyone he had . . . taken in.¹ Having melded with a normal human he had not even considered trying it previously; it made him wonder if consuming animals would have any positive effect. Things continued as normally as they could, Harry occasionally catching and consuming Death Eaters, right up until late July.

Minerva McGonagall was nothing if not meticulous, Albus always said. She kept records of what dates letters were sent out, when they were replied to, and various other things. She was remiss, however, in not keeping track of who the letters actually went to, most specifically in the case of potential first years. But this was not an issue until after she had already visited the homes of invited muggle-borns, to show their families that magic was in fact real, the letter was not some kind of a hoax, and so on and so forth.

It was when she was glancing over her lists that she realized no reply had come from one Mr Harry Potter, and this concerned her greatly, especially when she thought back to when little Harry had been placed with those awful Dursley people. Why Albus had insisted was not something she could readily understand, especially when there were upstanding, kind people who had offered to adopt the poor orphan. She had told him so, repeatedly.

In consequence she directed the quill used to address envelopes for first years to prepare one for Potter and was subsequently astonished and alarmed when it refused to do anything. Moments later she was at the fireplace, placing a call to the headmaster. It wasn't long before Albus was on his way to N^o 4 Privet Drive, carrying a hand-addressed letter in his pocket.

A ring of the doorbell brought a horse-faced woman to the door, who paled on seeing him. "What do you want?" she hissed quietly. "Is this about the freak?" Her eyes darted around nervously, looking beyond him and even over her shoulder.

"I have come," Albus said, "to see Mr Potter."

The woman pulled the door all the way open and sharply gestured him in, closing it quickly once he was inside. "In there," she said, pointing at a door off the hall. "I'll go fetch him."

1 ["Jikininki](#) are preta of the 26th class in Japanese Buddhism"—"also sometimes considered a form of rakshasa or gaki ("hungry ghosts")"—"individuals cursed after death to seek out and eat human corpses". Also, "several stories give them the ability to magically disguise themselves as normal human beings".

There *are* vague concessions to Mercedes Lackey's [Children of the Night](#) (*A Diana Tregarde Investigation*), as well. Obviously, the jikininki who melded with Harry is not visible to the eyes of most while in base form, and the mist form and consumption method are borrowed from *Children of the Night* (at least, that's how I remember the gaki there going about things, but my memory might be faulty).

Harry was in his room when his senses went on high alert; someone was coming, someone who radiated more power than those Death Eaters had, enough to warn him well in advance. He spied out his bedroom window to see an oddly-dressed old man approaching, and as much as would have liked to mist down there, he was concerned in this case that he would be noticed in that form. Soon enough Petunia was knocking at his door, so he went to open it, arching a brow at her questioningly.

“Someone to see you in the living room,” she said quickly, then fled.

‘Great.’ Harry left his room and proceeded downstairs, entering the living room with narrowed eyes.

“Harry, it’s wonderful to see you again,” said the old man, blue eyes twinkling and a smile gracing his face.

“Who are you, sir, and why are you addressing me so familiarly?”

The man looked vaguely taken aback, but answered readily enough. “I am Professor Albus Dumbledore, and I knew your parents well. I’ve known you since you were a baby.”

‘So this is the man who dumped me here to be abused. How nice.’ “All right, but I don’t know you at all. I would be more comfortable if you did not address me in the familiar, please.”

Dumbledore nodded, his brow crinkling slightly, and said, “It came to my attention that an error was made when it came to the letters being sent out this year for the school I am headmaster of; you did not receive one. I have come to remedy that.” He paused, inviting questions, but when Harry said nothing continued on. “I represent Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.”

Harry snorted openly.

“Did your aunt not tell you of your past, who and what your parents were?”

“Oh, I know about that, but I have trouble believing it,” he lied.

Dumbledore smiled again, indulgently. “I shall demonstrate for you.” Movement saw a focus appear in the old man’s hand, and a quick, tight pattern turned the coffee table into a pig, which was just as quickly reverted. Dumbledore appeared mildly confused when Harry failed to react with awe.

“Looks like a silly thing to do. Can you even do anything useful with this magic?” Had he been able to read minds he would have known that Dumbledore was blaming Petunia for his blasé and suspicious attitude. As it was, all he saw was the old man crinkling his brow again briefly.

“Ha—Mr Potter, has anything odd ever happened around you? Strange occurrences that you can’t explain?”

“Like what?”

“Such as if you were angry about something, and an item exploded? An object moving toward you, something you wanted very badly but could not reach?”

Harry shook his head.

“Hrm.” Dumbledore stroked his beard thoughtfully, then looked at him with piercing eyes. “May I try a test? I wish to determine if you really are magical.”

Harry narrowed his eyes again. “Will it hurt?”

“Oh, no, not at all. Just a spell to check the level of your magic, to determine if you are qualified to attend Hogwarts.”

He considered that, unable to prevent a sense of unease wending down his spine, but decided that he must allow it. Killing the man might not be so easy as killing Death Eaters, and if Dumbledore went missing on a day he visited Harry. . . . “Okay.”

Dumbledore cast another spell, this time aimed at him, and he was surprised to see a glow surround him, so faint it was barely there. The old man dropped his hand and sighed heavily. “It appears that you were damaged that night.”

Harry knew damn well he was magical, so it must have something to do with his demonic melding; there was no other explanation as to why whatever spell it was showed otherwise. Was it possible he was instinctively cloaking himself, sort of like how those Klingon ships could do? “What night? You mean when my parents died? My aunt told me they got themselves blown up.”

Dumbledore sighed again and shook his head, then stared at him intently, his focus hand twitching slightly.

Harry felt extreme shock when he realized there was . . . something . . . applying a kind of pressure inside his head. Without thought he turned to mist and overlapped the old man, intent of stripping anything of interest from his mind, especially anything having to do with the spell the old man must have cast.

Petunia timidly poked her head in at one point, but quickly went away, as Harry copied memory after memory after memory. When he was finished he maintained the overlap to keep Dumbledore unaware and unmoving. Diligent searching gave him his answer. The old man had tried to read his mind, looking both for the ghost of a memory of the night the Potters were killed, and for any evidence of abuse the Dursleys might have practiced on Harry.

As importantly, among the wealth of information he now had and the concepts of Occlumency and Legilimency, he knew how to modify memories, and that is exactly what he did. He released Dumbledore after and shifted back, then waited until the old man recovered.

On doing so Dumbledore said, "I'm terribly sorry, Mr Potter. There's been a great misunderstanding. I shan't take up any more of your time. Please have a good day and I shall see myself out." And then he left, shaking his head sadly.

Harry smiled and made plans to head to Diagon Alley, and Gringotts.

2 : THING

It was still fairly early in the day so Harry tracked down Petunia. “He’s gone. I’m going to London, so I’ll be out for most of the day.” He could see that she desperately wanted to ask questions, but stuck to her policy of never speaking to him unless it was absolutely necessary.

Instead she lifted a finger, left, and returned shortly with a bundle of notes, laying them on the table. Harry took them and stuffed them in his pocket; it seemed she was pleased to get rid of him for the day. He didn’t need the money. Petunia had eventually started handing over notes when it got to the point where Harry wished to keep books, not just borrow them, and he had quite a bit available still to him.

With a faint nod he quit the kitchen and went to his room to get a few things, then was on his way, stopping briefly in a public loo to change appearance, a face acquired from Japan hundreds of years ago. Stolen memory supplied where he needed to go to find the Leaky Cauldron, and once inside he slipped to the back and through the door, and sparked the correct brick to open the gateway.

Gringotts was up ahead, a gleaming marble edifice, so he made his way toward it and inside. When it was his turn he spoke in rapid Japanese, requesting to see a manager. The goblin was reluctant to do so until he took a good look at Harry, then quickly complied. Harry was led off to a lavish office and offered a seat, which he took.

The goblin behind the desk looked alarmed insofar as Harry could tell, and introduced himself as Alguff. “What can we of Gringotts do for you today?”

Harry smirked; he was getting the distinct impression that these goblins were a lot more aware than wizards. Thus, he reverted to his normal form. “I’m here to inquire about any and all Potter accounts.”

“We—we will have to verify your identity, but once that is established you will have our full cooperation.”

“I get the feeling you know exactly what I am,” he said. “Proceed.”

After a bit of bloodletting and verification the goblin produced several files and began to go over them. “We received word from Albus Dumbledore that you are a squib when he dropped off your key, though he is obviously mistaken.”

“Yes, well. It appears that even very powerful wizards cannot match a goblin’s senses.”

Alguff’s lips twitched toward something approximating a smile, but he quickly corrected his expression. “As a squib you would have only had access to your trust vault. The main vault would have been held until you produced a magical child. As your parents did not actually file

a will that I am aware of, standard laws apply. Even so, it is extremely irregular for anyone to grant full access in the event of death when the child is still a minor. However, as you are not a squib, things change slightly. As a minor you have access to the trust vault, which is what they're intended for. At age seventeen you will gain access to and control of the main vault."

Harry nodded. "Back up a moment. The key?"

"Dumbledore brought the main vault key here not long after your parents died, along with the contents of the house. Your family went into hiding under a fidelius charm, so he must have been one of the few people able to enter. He obviously kept the trust key, perhaps in order to give it to you himself when the time was right. Why, I do not know, as it would have been handed over by us the first time you visited."

Harry made a mental note to possibly mist Dumbledore again if it seemed necessary, as that was slightly suspicious, but for the time being he would let the matter go. As it was, he had yet to completely go over what he had stolen from the old man's mind. He watched as Alguff produced a key from his desk, and took it when offered. "I plan to make a number of purchases in the near future and I expect that will be expensive. What are my options for payment, keeping in mind that I wish to remain anonymous while doing so."

"Unfortunately, coin only. All other methods are dependent on identity. However, we can provide a pouch—for a fee—which will hold a fair amount of galleons, and be theft-proof. Our coins weigh far less than the equivalent amount of metal in the muggle world." Alguff hesitated, then asked, "Are you aware of how the monetary system works?"

"No, I'm afraid not. And also, is there anyone who gets reports regarding my accounts?"

Alguff shook his head. "No. All vaults are monitored internally. Reports only go out on request by the owner. Even though you are a minor, your privacy is maintained. Were your parents alive they could, obviously. If you were placed with a blood relative they might be able to petition for reports, but they would have no say in how you used the money. When the trust vault runs dry that is the end of it until you come of age."

"My aunt has no idea that I have any money, and I'm not about to tell her. She isn't magical anyway."

"Wise. Now, the coins we use are galleons, sickles, and knuts. Gold, silver, and bronze respectively. There are seventeen sickles to a galleon and twenty-nine knuts to a sickle. Muggle-born students and their parents generally have trouble adjusting to this."

"I can see why," he said dryly, wondering what crackpot had come up with the magical system. "This is based on the worth of the metals by weight?"

“Yes. At the present time a knut is worth about one pence, a sickle twenty-nine pence, and a galleon five pounds. It fluctuates slightly based on just how much muggle currency we are asked to exchange, but generally it stays at about those values.”

“All right. I would like the pouch you mentioned, and then an escort to my trust vault, though I would prefer to be in disguise at that time.”

Alguff nodded. “I will get you one and key it to you, then escort you myself. One moment.”

Shortly thereafter he was striding out of Gringotts with his earlier Japanese face, pouch practically bulging with galleons, and an overview courtesy of Alguff of the shops in the alley. His first stop saw him purchasing a backpack, one which the salesman assured him had been made roomier with an extension charm, and also negated the weight of the contents past a certain threshold. Even with that he was cautious when it came to purchases in the various other shops, deciding to start with an overview of everything. He would return when he was ready for more.

In the year that followed he returned a number of times. Preparing for his GCE A-levels was hardly an effort given his eidetic memory so he turned to the magical world. The Daily Prophet he had delivered was somewhere between a gossip rag and an answer to insomnia, but he occasionally found parts of it amusing.

“Well?” Minerva asked anxiously.

“This stays between you and me,” Albus said seriously.

“Yes, of course. I know you wouldn’t ask that of me unless it was necessary.”

He nodded. “Harry Potter is a squib.”

“What? No,” she protested “How is that possible?”

“I was unable, despite several tests, to determine the exact cause. It may be a side effect of that night. I do recall that Poppy was concerned over his lack of magic at the time, but I felt confident that it was merely magical exhaustion. Obviously, I may have been gravely mistaken. It also crossed my mind while speaking with Harry that the Dursleys may have done something to him, but was unable to find any evidence.”

“So what happens to him now?” she asked after a long pause.

“He will remain safely with the Dursleys, beneath the wards,” he replied, failing to mention that Petunia considered the boy a freak. “There is no reason he cannot have a fulfilling life in the muggle world.”

“And when he comes of age? What then? Do you really think the wards will hold past that point?”

Albus pushed down the slight irritation he felt at her questions. “By then, I hope, the issue of Voldemort will be no more.” He pushed down irritation again when she shuddered at the name. “Should anyone ask, you know nothing. Let them draw their own conclusions. I imagine what fertile imaginations should come up with will more than fuel the rumor mill, at least for a while, until something else of interest comes up. It is the way of things.”

When he left she seemed to be lost in worried contemplation. It was to be expected; the Marauders, despite their disruptive antics, had been some of her favorite students, and by extension the only child: Harry.

He arrived at his home in a bit of a quandary. Harry Potter certainly seemed to fit the prophecy, but he was a squib. How could the child possibly defeat Voldemort with no magic? Even with the alleged “power the Dark Lord knows not”? He spent the better part of the remaining day going over the prophecy, until the words were so firmly etched into his mind, and he had considered so many possibilities, that he questioned the meanings of “live” and “survive” and began to wonder if “other” referred not to Harry or Voldemort, but to a third party.

And then he began to wonder if Trelawney hadn’t simply successfully faked the prophecy during her interview, something he had not thought possible. He was, after all, quite difficult to trick. And yet, even if it was a fake, it stood to reason that what Voldemort had overheard had created something on the order of a self-fulfilling prophecy. Perhaps Lily, in her unique brilliance, had found a way to cheat death for her son using herself as the sacrifice. That Harry had survived would only serve to enforce in Voldemort’s mind that Harry was most certainly his enemy and must be killed, thus making the validity of the prophecy a moot point.

Perhaps it was best that Harry was a squib. Voldemort surely knew that Harry was scheduled to attend as a first year, and with the philosopher’s stone going to be secured within Hogwarts, should Voldemort come to realize that Harry was not where he was supposed to be, he would focus his efforts elsewhere. Albus had to assume that Voldemort was not truly gone; clothing aside, he had no solid proof the man was dead.

Should he keep an eye on Neville Longbottom? True, his parents had been driven to insanity by Death Eaters and not Voldemort, and there was inconclusive evidence regarding what may or may not have been done to Neville, but could the results be said to have been done by Voldemort’s hand, simply because it was his people doing it?

Molly Weasley hoped that when she led her children through Kings Cross Station she would encounter Harry Potter. He would obviously be a Gryffindor, just like his parents. That being so, and with the surety that Ron would be placed there, and later, Ginny, her family stood a

better than decent chance of being able to boast (not that she would, of course) of having the boy's friendship.

Unfortunately for her there was no sign of the child, but on the off chance of attracting him should he be simply one in the bustling crowd she said, a bit louder than she should, "It's the same every year. Simply packed with muggles." Nothing. She sighed in disappointment and continued on her way, fending off hushed puzzled questions from her older offspring as to why this year of all years they had not simply floo'd onto the platform, and saw her children through the barrier, then followed.

Still no sign of the child. She only hoped that Harry would be safe, what with the notorious Sirius Black having escaped from Azkaban. She also hoped that Ron would keep his temper that year. He did have the disconcerting tendency to react without thinking, especially to teasing and insults.

Ron Weasley was so disappointed. Harry Potter was supposed to be a fellow first year, but he was nowhere to be found on the train. Was he in disguise, in case some of the older Slytherins felt the urge to go after him? How could he make friends if he couldn't find him?

Draco Malfoy was very frustrated. He had been to every single compartment and there was no sign of Harry Potter. He was determined to offer his hand in friendship, but how could he do that if Potter wasn't available?

Halfway to Hogsmeade all of the students were stunned into a state of frozen fear when the train lurched to a stop and dementors began gliding by, pausing at each compartment. Some fainted, some cried, and a couple even wet themselves.

Voldemort was absolutely enraged, having started practically oozing anger the second he realized that Harry Potter was not among the students to be sorted that year. He was also disgusted that his host was sweating heavily under his turban, more so than usual, and the smell of stale sweat combined with garlic was enough to make him want to sneeze repeatedly. Except, dark lords did not sneeze, or at least not with any witnesses present.

What had Dumbledore done? Had he shipped the boy off to some ultra-secret and heavily-warded place to receive private tutoring? The old man obviously was not taking chances with the Boy Who Lived. It remained to be seen if Dumbledore was even bright enough to realize that his worst enemy was sitting at the very same table.

Dumbledore was beset with problems even before the school year had begun. Dementors on the train! Hysterical children—but at least Hagrid and Minerva were saddled with those. The ministry had gone too far in his opinion just on that alone, but to then set a contingent of dementors to guard the school against Sirius Black? Madness! Sheer, unadulterated madness.

Quirrell stuttered so badly that his students were hard pressed to learn anything, and those same students were so occupied with gossip over the missing Harry Potter and the presence of dementors that too many ignored their homework, resulting in a record number of house points lost and detentions awarded.

Snape was in a right foul mood over not having Harry around to sneer at, mock, and otherwise verbally thrash. An entire class of Hufflepuff first years exited in tears one day and had to be sent en masse to the infirmary where they could be given calming potions to settle their nerves. Snape was so incensed that he accidentally gave one of his stupider Slytherins a detention, which was simply unheard of. He was also antagonistic toward Quirrell, but that might be nothing more than the lack of his real target combined with Quirrell's spinelessness and speech impediment.

By the time Halloween rolled around the student body had settled down, though there were some who had to be pushed to attend classes for Herbology and Care of Magical Creatures due to their locations. Albus was halfway through a wonderful lemon sponge cake when the doors of the Great Hall banged open and Quirrell rushed in.

“Troll in the dungeons, thought you ought to know,” he blurted out, amazingly enough without stuttering, then collapsed in a dead faint.

He eyed the man for a moment, but was quickly distracted by the sheer amount of panic generated in those seconds. “Prefects, quickly!” he said as he stood. “Lead your houses to your common rooms!” He wasn't too concerned about the Slytherins when he said it; they were supposed to be wily.

Snape headed for the back entrance as Albus gathered up the other staff members to go investigate. They discovered quickly enough that the troll was nowhere to be found so he directed them back to the ground floor and split them into teams. A piercing scream a short time later saw him running toward the sound; alas, the staff was too late to save a muggle-born first year. The troll, however, was soundly defeated. Filch would have an awful time cleaning up the mess. The girl's corpse had barely been removed to the infirmary when a prefect came racing down the hall, sliding to a stop nearby.

“Headmaster! The Fat Lady has been attacked!”

Albus let out a tiny, tiny sigh, then moved on to the next crisis.



Harry opened his Daily Prophet and goggled for a moment. Two attacks at the school in one night? Perhaps it was best all around that he was nowhere near Hogwarts. Given what he had read he rather assumed that people would have expected him to do something about these events, as though somehow surviving a killing curse qualified him for the job of all-purpose hero. Right. Slay the troll, save the damsel in distress, track down and incarcerate the escaped criminal, and offer sympathy and portrait-mending services to a fat lady. He shook his head, finished the paper, and resumed studying.

Voldemort cursed eloquently in Parseltongue, wrath over being thwarted in his first attempt at heading through the gauntlet of challenges behind the door on the third floor corridor and beyond the trap door. Snape was like a leech. On the one hand that raised suspicion in his mind. Then again, he could tell that Severus despised Quirrell and probably could not connect the pathetic wizard with himself. Thus, if Quirrell was after the philosopher's stone it was probably for his own purposes.

And true, it was suspicious that a man who had a talent for handling trolls panicked, but admittedly, he could only push Quirrell so much—too much and the man would burn out, forcing Voldemort to begin possessing creatures again. Voldemort was also incensed at Dumbledore's utterly uncaring attitude toward the Slytherin students. Sending them toward where the troll allegedly was? Inexcusable.

Voldemort played it cool for most of the remaining school year, avoiding Snape as much as possible (though there were times when Severus would threaten Quirrell, whose stuttering would become so bad his speech was incomprehensible), and working on ways to get Dumbledore out of the school for long enough.

During that time he was inordinately amused over the antics of one Sirius Black, who continued to terrorize the castle inhabitants and avoid the dementors. For the Light to have unceremoniously tossed one of their own into Azkaban without a trial (even his Death Eaters had received trials!), they deserved a healthy dose of fear. He had no real idea why Black was targeting the school, unless it was revenge in mind (for surely, many went completely mad within the prison's walls), but if nothing else it was helping to deflect interest in any of Quirrell's suspicious activities.

He was exceptionally pleased when Dumbledore informed the staff that the minister had demanded a conference at the ministry regarding matters affecting the school. He was even more pleased when Severus, shortly thereafter, raced off toward the grounds after looking out the window.

Voldemort had Quirrell make haste for the forbidden corridor. Through the door, a quick tune to soothe the beast, and beneath the trap door saw them landing in Devil's Snare, which was easily induced to back off. None of the other challenges were even a challenge, and Voldemort was soon inside the final chamber, only to be faced with a huge freestanding mirror. He spent hours there attempting to unlock its secrets, but in the end gave up in frustration, shattering

the loathsome thing. So much for the philosopher's stone. If it was somehow hidden by or within that mirror, it should now be irretrievable.

Disgusted and angry, Voldemort decided to leave the school and find another way to regain his body and strength. Neville Longbottom had the unfortunate luck to be crossing the entrance hall, and was summarily kidnapped and brought along. He had been meaning to kill the child anyway, and he certainly counted as an enemy, being one of the two children possibly mentioned by what little of the prophecy he had been informed of. Too bad Snape had not known the whole if it.

Ron Weasley found out it was simply not his day when a huge, snarling, black dog tackled him while he was on a walk (mostly to avoid Percy nagging him about his sad showing that year in terms of schoolwork). He was then dragged off toward the Whomping Willow, and it was all he could do to keep hold of his pet rat. It also did not help that his leg was broken after they got close enough, and the pain he was in short-circuited his thinking processes.

The next thing he knew he was being dragged through a tunnel, and then up through a trap door. How a dog could manage all of this was not something he was capable of focusing on for the time being. That is, until he looked up after arms picked him up and tossed him unceremoniously onto a bed which had seen better days. The man with longish black hair, grey eyes, and a frighteningly evil grin was Sirius Black. Ron, being the very brave boy he was, briefly lost consciousness. When he came to his brothers Fred and George were there. He tried to warn them, but they ignored him.

“All right, where are they? We know both Black and Pettigrew are here!” said one, while the other twin was turning in circles and staring intently at everything. “If Pettigrew is alive, then. . . .”

Black revealed himself, still with that evil grin, and pointed at Ron. “He’s holding the rat. Wormtail, come out,” he singsonged. “Show these nice people you’re alive, and then tell them all about how you betrayed the Potters, killed thirteen muggles, and framed me for everything!”

Ron clutched Scabbers close to his chest. “You’re mad! It’s just a rat! He’s been in the family for years.”

“And just how long does the average rat li—”

Snape burst into the room and knocked Black unconscious, Scabbers escaped Ron’s grasp and fled the scene, and the twins protested for a bit before thinking better of it. One twin spelled Ron aloft, and the group proceeded back into the tunnel, along it, and out the other side. Outside Black regained consciousness and morphed into that dog, managing to get away, and causing Snape to chase after him, while the twins brought Ron to the infirmary. They refused to answer any of his questions, either.

Madam Pomfrey descended and forced vile concoctions down his throat—to heal his leg, she said—but it prevented him from sleeping for ages, and caused him quite a lot of pain. The next day was when he learned that Black had been caught by the dementors and Kissed, and Neville had disappeared.

Albus sighed and shook his head. One student seriously harmed, a student and a professor missing, and how much of it could have been prevented had Cornelius better timing? At least the philosopher's stone was safe. He glanced up at a particular chandelier in the entrance hall. It had been donated by an absurdly wealthy alumnus (which made it almost impossible to refuse) and had all the artistic value of something tossed together by a bunch of mentally-challenged toddlers. Even so, the huge, fake, rough gems used in it meant it had been easy to replace one with the real treasure. And best of all, Peeves knew everyone hated it, so he never thought to cause it damage.

He sighed again. The only reason he had retained his position as headmaster, despite pressure from Cornelius, was the fact that the ministry had provided the so-called security that year. Thus, the majority onus was off Albus's shoulders.

Voldemort cackled quietly to himself as he arranged things at one of his safeholds in Albania. Longbottom was enjoying a nice long sleep, he had gained a familiar in the form of an enormous snake, and Wormtail had turned up to be his dotting and terrified minion. Quirrell, no longer necessary, had been burnt out, and Nagini was providing one of the components necessary for strengthening him for the ritual: her venom.

Two months later all was in readiness. The Black Arts potion required was bubbling away nicely in a large cauldron, Longbottom was on hand to supply blood of an enemy unwillingly given, bones had been retrieved from the grave of his father to be unknowingly given, and Wormtail was so under his thrall that he would willingly provide flesh of the servant. The ritual itself took all of ten minutes and Voldemort was soon in a body of his own once more, ready to take care of a few loose ends.

An awake Longbottom, tears and snot sliding down his face in an unwholesome and disgusting display, was quickly dispatched with a killing curse. Wormtail, who had gone completely overboard and sacrificed his entire right hand, was granted a new, silver one. The sniveling gratitude made Voldemort consider killing his minion, but he might continue to be useful. And the moment he gave her a nod of permission Nagini moved to swallow the boy, an expedient meal.

He would reestablish his dominion over the Death Eaters and set them to work. Lucius, having remained free, might possibly be effective when it came to tracking down where the Potter boy was being hidden. Possibly. Back in England Voldemort established himself at his

primary stronghold, a heavily-warded large building smack in the middle of a forest. Wormtail was set to cleaning after Lucius was summoned.

He, after arriving and showing the briefest expression of shock, bowed and waited.

“You will do your utmost to discern where Potter is. I am aware he was not at Hogwarts last year, so it is possible the old fool has him in training somewhere secret. However, Dumbledore has a bleeding heart and will probably wish for the child to have a childhood, so he will not push him too hard, which means it is likely he spends his summers elsewhere. Find him.”

“Yes, my lord.”

“You are dismissed.”

Harry arrived at Gringotts and was immediately escorted to Alguff without ever having to say a word. Once he was seated Alguff said, “I requested your presence due to Sirius Black.”

“The Daily Prophet reported that he was caught and Kissed by dementors. I assume he finally died, then? What does this have to do with me?”

“Yes, he died just recently, which activated his will. Your parents named him godfather to you, and you are Black’s heir primus.”

Harry frowned and shook his head. “This is the man accused of betraying my parents and breaking out of Azkaban in order to kill me, and yet I’m his primary heir?”

Alguff shrugged. “Yes, though I admit, I must wonder why he stayed around Hogwarts for so long when you were clearly not there. In any case the bulk of his estate goes to you. This includes money, artifacts, books, furnishings, a home in London, and one house-elf. He descended from the main branch of the Blacks and thus was heir to the estate, able to decide the next. Had he not made a will control would have passed to the closest cadet branch, currently headed by Bellatrix Lestranger.”

“Who is in Azkaban.”

“Yes, though that makes no particular difference. I have here a detailed listing of what you’ve inherited.” Alguff pushed forward a folder.

He wasn’t all that concerned with the money or furnishings, but a having a house in London was nice, especially since it appeared to be heavily warded—something he would have to verify and update if necessary. The artifacts and books might be useful, as well. “Any idea about the house-elf?”

Alguff shook his head. “I suspect, however, based on knowledge of that branch, that the house-elf is steeped in blood purity teachings, so you might have problems with it. If you intend to keep it you may find yourself reeducating it. Otherwise, I would recommend dismissing it before it learns anything of value about you.”

Harry snorted quietly. Unless the creature proved to be slavishly devoted to him simply because he was its new master, he would dispose of it immediately. The fewer who knew anything of his secrets the better. The goblins were wise enough to understand what he was and what he could do to every last one of them, and they tended to stay out of the business of wizards. Their wars had finally established them as true warriors with strict codes of honor and expert overseers of finance. Wizards in general might not like them, but experience taught that pushing the goblins too far would result in a large loss of life on their side.

The magical history texts he had read painted a picture of wizards in general having become intolerant, bigoted, and prejudiced after relations with muggles broke down and they became actively hunted. No wonder the magical people had sought to separate themselves from those who hunted their kind. And yet, their ability to do magic had morphed views into one which supported the idea of superiority, which, given the slow-moving evolution of the magical world, rendered them ignorant of the truth.

He shook his head to clear it and looked over the folder contents again. “Is it possible to change the locks so that if there are any keys floating around out there they would be useless?”

“Yes.”

“Please do so as quickly as possible. After that is complete I will probably go through the vaults to determine how to proceed from there. Let me know when that’s done. For now I think I’ll go check out the house.”

Alguff nodded.

Harry took a taxi to his destination and grimaced at the condition of Grimmauld Place once he began walking its length; the area was not conducive to feelings of security. Slum might be an applicable term. As he walked the street expanded into a square sporting a small and shabby patch of unkempt grass at its center—like a miniature park left to rot—continuing farther on as a normal street once again. Number twelve was located within the square and had an exterior dark with soot and grime, though there were no heaps of trash laying outside the steps as with a number of the other houses.

He could tell based on the warding that residents of the area would at least wonder why there was no number twelve between ten and fourteen, but he supposed it had been that way for so long that it was more of an amusing quirk than anything else. ² A longstanding unplottable

² While the Harry Potter Lexicon shows that N^o 12 is between N^o 11 and N^o 13, this doesn’t jive with normal numbering systems, wherein all odd numbers are on one side of the road, with even on the other side. I’m changing canon in that respect so that N^o 12 is properly placed between N^o 10 and N^o 14.

charm would have that effect. The front door was adorned with a silver knocker in the shape of a twisted serpent; the moment Harry touched it the snake shifted under his hand, then the door swung silently open.

The ground floor hallway was a mess, silent testimony of neglect. The carpet was worn, paper on the walls was peeling, and cobwebs decorated corners, none of it hidden even with the dim quality of the gas lighting which came to life with his presence. He hadn't been there for more than thirty seconds when a small creature lurched in and began mumbling imprecations at him. It appeared the little beast—obviously the aforementioned house-elf—could somehow tell he was neither a Black nor a pure-blood.

It took only a few quick spells to kill the little beast, and it was shortly consumed, Harry being curious to see if doing so would afford him any advantages in the way of abilities the creatures possessed.³ Thankfully, given the size of his meal, it did not take him until morning to digest it. And even so, he was content to float around in mist form exploring his new house and making plans to fix it up and update the ward scheme.

³ Consumption of a corpse grants their appearance and any special abilities they have, but not magical forms, and only from humans. A house-elf would only provide a meal.

3: ALL

When Lucius came through with the location of Potter's relatives Voldemort was both pleased and annoyed. It had taken his minion a very long time to get past all the protections Dumbledore had emplaced, though whether that had been because of the Death Eaters who had slithered their way out of being sent to Azkaban or because the old man thought Voldemort was not truly gone was somewhat irrelevant.

When he arrived at their very normal house in their very normal neighborhood he took the time to examine the wards, a smile slowly forming on his face at the sheer ineptitude of whoever had fashioned them. His bet was on Dumbledore. That blood wards had been used and were weak meant that Potter's relationship with his relatives must be bad indeed. Yes, they would still present a problem to the majority of his minions, but for himself they were no more than a minor annoyance.

Even so, he was intelligent enough to realize that shattering them would probably bring the old man there immediately, so he resolved to handle things obliquely. The old man would never know what happened until after the fact, just as it should be. That being said, he waited until the family left the house in their car and followed them, snatching them after they exited the vehicle. Scans revealed no spells of any kind on them so they were brought to the prisoner cells at his stronghold to be interrogated.

It was evident almost immediately that they utterly loathed the child and were afraid of him given the shout of, "He's a freak just like his freak parents! Always doing freaky stuff and threatening my family!"

Voldemort took his time while asking questions, with careful application of pain curses to encourage the silly muggle to answer without ruining his mind. The truth could be discerned by use of Legilimency, but that could wait until he had satisfied his urge for torture.

"I don't know, I tell you! The damn hell-spawn won a scholarship somewhere. We were so pleased to get him out of the house we let him go without bothering to find out where!"

This was backed up later with Legilimency, with neither of them having a clue, and it was also revealed that Potter seemed to have control of his magic without needing a wand. If what he could see in the minds of these pathetic muggles was correct, Potter had far more control than he had ever had as a child, which was worrisome. In the end he took great delight in torturing them to death, starting with the fat whale of a man and ending with the woman; the corpses were dumped in an alley not far from where their vehicle was parked.

The implication he was left with was that Potter was in a muggle school, which made no sense to him. He would have thought Dumbledore would have the boy trained rather than leaving him to the mercy of muggles. The woman's memories clearly showed that Dumbledore had visited the house prior to what would have been Potter's first year at Hogwarts, but had left without taking the boy, and no one else had shown up after that. Had the old man deluded

himself into thinking Potter was a squib? Or was it that Potter had forced him to think so? The idea that Potter didn't trust the twinkly-eyed, grandfatherly façade of the headmaster was actually quite amusing. It wouldn't save him from death, though.

Harry was duly informed by school staff that his family had been killed and that they would get back to him as to his disposition for the incipient summer. He was then sent off with his tutor to one of the school chaplains, he assumed because they expected him to either be in denial and need to be coaxed out of it, or have some sort of a breakdown and need spiritual guidance. He took the news quietly, and the most they could get out of him was that he was not well-liked by his family.

Further news revealed to Harry that the Dursley will would see Dudley packed off to his Aunt Marge, while he was to be sent to an orphanage. And, given that he had already applied to and been accepted by University College London (contingent on his GCE scores), it would be somewhere in London itself. He found that to be annoying, but supposed he could get away easily enough on a regular basis, and not just for his schooling. At least he had left nothing of interest at the Dursley home, so he would never have to return there. He would, however, have to stop his subscription to the Daily Prophet and begin buying it day by day, unless his new accommodations afforded him an easy way to avoid having muggles ask questions about why owls kept visiting him.

Dumbledore received the news only because the instrument which monitored the wards had informed him they had fallen. The only way for that to be true was if Harry or Petunia were dead, and the monitor for Harry was unchanged. He supposed he would have to track down where the boy would be sent, just in case, though he continued to have severe doubts about the validity of the prophecy. It might well be that he would have to, once again, take up the mantle of destroyer of dark lords.

A floo call had Nymphadora Tonks, a half-blood with a muggle-born father and sympathetic to him, on the task of investigating in the muggle world. The least he could do would be to keep an eye on the boy for the time being, even if it turned out to be pointless in the end.

Voldemort did much the same as Dumbledore, though he had to comb through his ranks to find any half-bloods, which was no easy task given that many half-bloods were corrupted by their muggle heritage, and only a small percentage understood the truth. He himself had been too long from the muggle world and had no idea how to go about it personally, nor could he be bothered to learn.

In mid-June, after he had been established in his new 'home', Harry became aware of another magical in the vicinity. While not Dumbledore, whoever it was was also quite powerful, and Harry quite carefully managed to mist the person, who turned out to be the self-titled Lord Voldemort. He kept him incapacitated long enough to sort through some of the new information he had acquired, which just so happened to include the secret of Voldemort's survival on that Halloween night, and how he had managed to regain a physical body.

And, while he had no doubt that Voldemort would happily destroy the orphanage without the least hesitation, Harry was not so inclined to bring death to essentially innocent people. That being so, he consumed the man on the spot, forced the wand to him which had dropped to the ground, and drifted off to № 12 Grimmauld Place to digest his meal. ⁴

Perusal of the Daily Prophet several weeks later showed that Alastor Moody, aka Mad-Eye Moody, a retired auror notorious for his paranoia and alleged friend to Dumbledore, had gone missing.

Voldemort was spitting mad by the time he had regained a body once again. He still had no idea what had happened to him. One moment he was scouting the area of the boy's location and the next he was a spirit again. He had never even felt the spell which killed him.

It was very tempting to track Potter down again right away, but perhaps it would be wiser to focus on other things first. He knew where the child lived, so he would keep for a while, especially as it was known via the reports of his minions that the child was unknown for visiting the wizarding world. Making sure his people were in position would go a long way toward making the ministry fold when he showed up with the corpse of their savior. Planning would get him everywhere. Blind rage would likely see him ejected from his body again.

He called to him one of his minions known to correctly follow orders and not get ideas of their own, then ordered the man to haunt Potter. There would be no attacks, no entering the orphanage, or any other overt actions; he was simply to keep an eye out for any changes in the boy's circumstances and report weekly, sooner if an emergency arose.

"Again?" he asked.

"Yes. Just last night it darkened again. I have no idea what has happened and have not been summoned," Severus replied.

Albus crinkled his brow and glanced at his monitoring instruments. "I must wonder why. You have done nothing except follow the orders he gave you. The fact that your Dark Mark keeps

⁴ A gaki is a being cursed to consume something, usually something we would consider very unpleasant. In this case, it's corpses. That doesn't mean this version of gaki!Harry can't consume live beings. Though, they might wriggle uncomfortably for a while at first. . . .

changing shows us that Voldemort is not truly gone. I presume you would have told me already had anyone said something to you.”

“Of course.”

“See what you can find out, thought I expect it will be . . . very little, sadly, until you are contacted directly or called.”

The year passed for Harry fairly uneventfully, if one disregards the number of Death Eaters he consumed, those who had been watching the orphanage, probably on the orders of Voldemort. He left the watchers from Dumbledore alone. They, however, were clueless as to how much or how little the old man was aware of. It was late one Saturday night, when everyone in the orphanage was sleeping, that he sneaked out under cover of invisibility so he could safely apparate to N^o 12 Grimmauld Place. One Horcrux was already there, the locket.

The diary of Tom Riddle was in the possession of Lucius Malfoy, but Harry suspected it was nonviable given that it had been the first created.⁵ He also suspected the Gaunt ring was useless, for the reason that it had been created second. Even so, he was going after it and already had a copy he intended to leave in its place if the ring proved to be viable. As it turned out it was useless, but he switched it anyway and returned to his house feeling pleased.

The Hufflepuff cup would be a problem unless the goblin definition of full cooperation covered that artifact, and the Ravenclaw diadem would have to wait until he could find the time to get into Hogwarts. Nagini, Voldemort’s recent familiar, would simply have to wait, even though he was fully aware of where Voldemort resided in Britain. The ring went on a shelf and Harry headed to Gringotts, laughing a bit due to Voldemort not even being aware that his Horcruxes were being used up each time he had to regain a body. So damn intelligent, yet so damn ignorant at the same time.

Alguff, though nervous when the matter was explained to him, was more than willing to inquire. He was back shortly thereafter with approval from the bank’s director, despite the highly irregular request. Alguff escorted Harry down to the Lestrangle vault and opened it for him, then waited outside as Harry deftly switched the real cup for the duplicate he had made. It wasn’t long afterward that Harry was back at N^o 12 Grimmauld Place with another Horcrux in his collection.

Satisfied with the night’s work Harry returned to the orphanage and settled in to sleep.

⁵ In canon the Horcruxes do not seem to be affected in any way when Voldemort has his little cauldron bath at the conclusion of the Triwizard Tournament; all of them still contain their soul shards and have to be destroyed. In this story they get used up, though that does not affect any protections placed on or around them.

When autumn of 1994 rolled around Harry was interested to note that a Triwizard Tournament was being held at Hogwarts. It was surprising considering what he had read of them in the past, what with the potential for deaths, and wondered who had been so persuasive as to garner enough support to host another. He expected that Dumbledore had been adamant about not sending any of his students and staff to the mainland should it be held at Beauxbatons or Durmstrang, which would explain how it came to be held locally. If nothing else it gave him a ready opportunity to visit the castle during the events, and during one hopefully slip away long enough to obtain the diadem.

The first opportunity came in late November. Harry was in the stands wearing one of his faces, knowing after hearing what the task would be that he would actually like to watch rather than sneak off. Hopefully the second task would be more conducive to his plans. Even so, he eyed the grounds and castle with memories of more than one person in mind.

When he returned in late February he realized, after hearing what the task would involve, that it was the perfect time to slip into the school. For that he went as a cat, having long since stopped by an animal shelter which euthanized animals there for too long to try on a few new forms, taking ones which had already been put to sleep.⁶

Voldemort's memory was foremost in his mind as he made his way to the seventh floor, and then as he paced back and forth asking for the exact same thing Riddle had. Inside was a hodgepodge of everything under the sun, but Harry knew what he was looking for and was able to find the diadem without much trouble. A quick switch was enacted and he was back at the second task with no one the wiser. Though, truthfully, he had to wonder why anyone would *want* to 'watch' the second task, given that staring at a dark lake was about as exciting as watching paint dry.

He realized, once he was back to his normal life, surrounded by normal things, that while he could actually seek out Voldemort and keep killing him, it might cause the madman to become suspicious enough to start investigating things, and that might result in a check on the Horcruxes. After a great deal of thought and playing out potential scenarios in his mind he decided that one more death would be all right, but only when he was ready.

Voldemort was becoming rather peeved that so many of his Death Eaters kept going missing. He suspected that Dumbledore had something to do with it, but the method escaped him. A personal look at the area around the orphanage revealed no wards he could uncover, and it completely went against the old man's policy of redemption and endless second chances. He

⁶ To expand upon a footnote for chapter two: Say that this Harry consumed a wizard who had the ability to see a few seconds into the future. He would gain that ability along with that person's appearance. Consuming an animal would give the mundane form, but not any abilities (such as the killing/petrifying gaze of a basilisk, the disease breath of a nundu, etc.). Consuming a vampire, or a veela, etc., would give an equivalent non-magical form, but not their abilities. So no fangs, hypnotic gaze, bird form, and so on and so forth. A house-elf might grant the non-magical form equivalent of a very short person, but not their ability to apparently pop through wards, or their alleged telepathy.

himself was not fond of the idea of spending any amount of time near the boy just yet given what had happened the last time he had settled in to spy. Perhaps it was time to step things up?

True, with people not knowing he was alive it was easy for the general populace to wave away attacks on muggle towns as being done by supporters or random insane persons. They were not prepared to poke their heads out of their cozy lives of denial, which would make it that much more devastating when he did appear and terrorize them in person. Perhaps just a little longer.

His seventeenth birthday was fast approaching and Harry was pondering deeply his next course of action. He was aware, after having misted Voldemort again when the man had decided to pop by, that he should probably get a move on with things. Unfortunately, it was not as though he could gorge himself on Death Eaters and completely wipe out Voldemort's power base, though he could take out some of those who infested the ministry; he was not sure just what good that would do overall. After all, he cared very little for the wizarding world, and if too many of Voldemort's people died the man might become very suspicious of him. After a great deal of thought he came up with his plan.

On the thirty-first he was sitting in his room at the orphanage after having created a serious magical disturbance. The book he held in his hands was a historical account, guaranteed to make the blood pressure of any reasonably decent person spike in anger. This would, when questioned, be the cause of the disturbance. Harry promptly flung it across the room and watched as it slid down to the floor. He then found a much more interesting book to read.

It just so happened that at the time of the manufactured disturbance there was no Death Eater skulking around the area, but one of Dumbledore's minions was, and that minion fled immediately to report. When Harry sensed a magical approaching he checked to see who it was, mussed his hair a bit, and continued reading until a knock sounded at his door. "Come in." The door opened to reveal a woman he recognized from Dumbledore's memories as Professor McGonagall, though she was behind and off to the side from one of the orphanage ladies.

"Harry," Mrs Marquet said, "you have a visitor."

He set down his book with an irritated shrug and nodded, then gazed at McGonagall with wary curiosity as she entered.

"Mr Potter, I am Professor McGonagall. Is it all right if I close the door?"

Harry shrugged again. "Fine by me."

She did so quietly and turned back to him, her eyes widening momentarily when she saw what he was reading. After a moment she seemed to get a hold of herself. “Mr Potter,” she said slowly, “do you remember being visited some years ago by Professor Dumbledore?”

“Yes. He said he came to check up on me, as a favor to my parents.”

She nodded. “That makes this easier, then. You see, we had expected when you were eleven that you would be attending the school I teach at. Unfortunately, that fell through due to a reason which I will shortly explain. At the present time it seems it is possible.”

Harry arched a brow at her. “I’ve already finished schooling.”

A weird expression flitted across her face. “This is a different type of schooling.”

He glanced down at his book, frowned, and said, “Ah, that kind of schooling. Does this have something to do with that strange . . . thing . . . that happened earlier?”

She gave him a tight smile and nodded, then produced a wand and conjured a chair, seemingly a little put out when he lazily blinked. After seating herself she asked, “May I ask what happened earlier?”

“I was reading a history book and became angry,” he said simply.

“Oh?”

Rather than elaborate he answered her with a question. “What do you teach?”

“Transfiguration. I’m somewhat surprised at what you’re reading.”

“Why, because I’m a squib?” he countered.

McGonagall shook her head slightly, though it did not come across as a negative. “You are obviously not a squib given what happened earlier. I simply had no idea that you would have purchased any books of that nature.”

‘Because I’m allegedly a squib,’ he repeated in his mind. “He mentioned Gringotts. I got curious.”

She hesitated, nodded, then said, “With your permission I would like to check to see where your power level is. Assuming it is sufficient, which I have no doubt of given the strength of the spike earlier, you could attend Hogwarts and learn magic.”

Harry quickly de-cloaked his power such that he would appear to be average or a little above based on his memory of Dumbledore’s memories, then nodded.

Less than a minute later she was giving him another tight smile. “You should purchase a wand. I’m sure Mr Ollivander would be pleased to see you. Though. . .” She shook her head again. “I admit, having a new student at your age is a bit daunting. You are terribly behind, unfortunately.”

He smirked faintly. “Perhaps in waving a stick around, yes. I have, however, read extensively. For example, I’ve often wondered if the reason conjured items are impermanent is because what’s actually transfigured are dust particles in the air, something which by nature is not cohesive. The conjuration itself works against the very nature of the material being used.”

After a startled silence she launched into a comparative theory discussion which lasted quite a while, and morphed into other subjects entirely, guided by Harry’s desire to confound the woman.

“—have to wonder about a great many other things, as well. I mean, taking into account much of mythology, science, fantasy works, and even science fiction, it is possible to postulate that during the long history of evolution something like a meteorite strike caused a type of radiation which mutated part of the human race, creating the start of what one might term the magic gene. Those affected may have passed on the mutation to their offspring—perhaps as a recessive gene—and eventually children began being born who had this gene active. Over time they realized—probably through accidental magic—that they could effect changes in their environment.

“As more of them bred together, more of a population base appeared with these god-like powers. Or, at least, they would appear god-like to the humans of that time period. It might also explain, as a recessive gene, why muggle-borns appear seemingly out of nowhere, at least from the viewpoint of magical persons, because the parents involved each contributed to an active gene in one or more of their children. It’s also possible that what we call magic is simply the genetic ability to tap a form of energy from a separate plane of existence.”

Harry had to rigorously throttle back the desire to laugh as the expression on McGonagall's face became more and more confused.

“Were that true, it would explain why modern scientists have yet to stumble over this energy, and why it would interfere with electronics. This energy is not natural to this world, and disrupts what is natural. But that’s just theory. I can also imagine that inbreeding, which produces defects of varying severity in non-magical people, would do the same with magical people, resulting in defects such as mental degradation and even what you term squibs.

“On another look at separate planes of existence, it could be postulated that what magicals term as magical creatures are either mutated evolutionary paths of mundane creatures, much like how it may be true that humans divergently evolved, or, these creatures were actually summoned from a separate plane in quantities large enough to provide a fairly stable breeding population, maybe from the same plane in which we tap this energy termed magic. It would be excellent were that true given that the wizarding population does not seem to understand

about resource conservation, having hunted some species to extinction, or near extinction. So. . . .”

“Albus,” she said slowly, “his mind is. . . .”

He gave Minerva a worried look, and gestured for her to continue.

“Well, he’s either a very fast and glib talker, or more brilliant than anyone I have ever encountered. It seems that after your visit he became curious about the wizarding world and started purchasing books on every subject available. His theories are complicated enough and draw from so many sources of knowledge that I had real difficulty keeping up. He could also probably pass his NEWTs in non-wand subjects tomorrow.” She paused.

“Divination excepted. This is in addition to having completed his muggle schooling. In fact, he was quite derisive regarding Muggle Studies. Said that the texts he purchased were so backward and out of date it was laughable, and only served to show that wizards were probably mocking the muggles in order to keep wizards from losing their sense of superiority, despite the fact that muggle advances have surpassed our own intellectual growth and research. He pointed out that the blame probably rests with pure-bloods who seek to maintain the status quo and the foundation of their power base.”

By then Albus’s brows had risen up drastically, a reaction he covered by reaching out for a calming dose of sherbet lemon. “I see.”

Minerva heaved a sighed. “I have told him he should purchase a wand. When I checked using your little spell his power was slightly above average, which was disappointing. However, his intellect should more than make up for it. I have every expectation he would be sorted into Ravenclaw. What I don’t understand is why now.”

Albus aimed a vague smile at her and twinkled knowingly. “He did just turn seventeen. We both know that is the age of majority for a reason. Perhaps this is what unlocked his heretofore missing ability.” It sounded good to him, in theory anyway.

She nodded absently.

“My dear Minerva, I would like you to meet with him again, perhaps in a private room at the Leaky Cauldron, and begin going over some first year wand material. See how quickly he picks things up. While it is true that he would not be affected by the Trace, it is best that he refrain from any experimentation at his current home.”

“Yes, Albus. And what if he does pick things up quickly? Can it be arranged for him to take his OWLs? I have no doubt he already has all the theory down, and from the way he argues, he actually understands it as well. It does not appear to be observable rote memorization.”

“I think that could be arranged,” he said, “though he would have to pay proctor and evaluation fees given that he is taking them out of phase.”

She nodded again and drifted out, presumably to plan.

Harry headed off to Gringotts as soon as McGonagall disappeared off his radar to claim his inheritance. The goblins were most helpful, even providing an illegal two-way portkey to a shopping district in France, as he had no intention of visiting Ollivander's in Diagon Alley. There he visited the wand shop in one of his myriad faces and spent several hours going through wands, finally settling on one that at least produced some reaction to his magic. He wasn't actually going to be using it anyway, so it was a minor issue in his mind. It seemed his demonic side precluded 'proper' use of a wizard's most valuable tool.

On his return to Nº 12 Grimmauld Place he cast a few simple spells through it, proving that he could use it to some degree. He was more concerned with the notion that someone might, at some point, demand to perform *Priori Incantatem* on it, thus the need to at least partially channel any observable spells through the wand.

McGonagall arrived the next day to speak with him again and offer an invitation to a private meeting at the Leaky Cauldron to see how well he could use theory and knowledge in practical application. Once they had settled in and she had cast a few privacy wards she said, “I am somewhat surprised that no one has ever mentioned seeing you in the alley.”

He shrugged carelessly. “Nobody seemed to notice me when I first came here. Tom showed me how to get through the barrier when I mentioned I was a squib. Once I learned that I was famous I took measures to prevent identification.”

“Oh?”

“Wigs, for one thing, muggle makeup to hide the scar, and contact lenses to disguise my eye colour,” he lied. “Speaking of which, why is it that so many people know my distinguishing features? Was it really necessary for the entire wizarding world to know about the enduring reminder etched on my forehead that my parents were murdered? I guess privacy is something of a foreign concept around here. In fact, it would not surprise me if people would be tactless enough to demand to see the scar.” Even he wasn't sure why the scar existed. Surely if he had been hurt during the confrontation the wound could have been healed. The only explanation was that ridiculous prophecy.

Minerva shifted uncomfortably and cleared her throat. “Well, Mr Potter, why don't we begin by going over some of the first year spells.”

Several hours later he had proven to her that he was quite capable, thank you very much, though he did begin haltingly, and then occasionally fumble the totally unnecessary wand movements and force certain spells to come out wrong. The table exploded at one point when

his “mind wandered”, but McGonagall quickly fixed it. They agreed to continue meeting so he could work through the other four years with her—she pointed out that it would be highly irresponsible to do it any other way, citing Baruffio as an example—and Harry left for the day.

On his way out he noticed one of Voldemort’s lackeys on his tail again, but decided to let it lie. Someone had to remain alive to report back that Harry was now actively entering the wizarding world, after all. The two weeks following saw them meeting so he could be ‘guided’ through successive years, and he was eventually offered the opportunity, arranged by Albus Dumbledore on his behalf, to take the OWL exams.

While he was waiting for his results to arrive he had more meetings with her to go over sixth year material, and he deliberately flubbed more often and took longer to attempt to give the impression that he was reaching the point where an actual year in a formal school setting would be necessary if he were to properly learn seventh year material in wand subjects.

Naturally, his OWL results came back with perfect scores. McGonagall took him on a trip to show him how to pass through the barrier to Platform 9³/₄, then left him to his own devices until the first of September with a reminder about the Statute of Secrecy. Harry kindly refrained from rolling his eyes at her—well, until she was out of sight, at least.

4 : THINGS

He boarded the train early and found a compartment, tossing up an aversion ward to secure his privacy, and settled in to consider the myriad ways his plans might unfold—or, perhaps, be discarded entirely. The passing scenery became a dull blur after a while, which further helped him to retreat into his thoughts. It was when the train began to slow that he realized McGonagall had not given him any idea of what to do once he arrived. Was he supposed to go with the first years, or the other students? What an annoying woman. Well, he did have to be sorted, so. . . .

It was awkward settling into a boat with mere children, and the blatant staring. McGonagall gave him another tight smile at the other end when she saw him and approached to inform him that, “You will be sorted first, Mr Potter.”

Children nearby gasped and went wide-eyed at this confirmation of his identity, but thankfully were too shy, unnerved, or polite to begin pestering him with questions. His first view of the Great Hall in person was mildly interesting, but having seen it already via memory he was not impressed as the first years were. Irritation set in when it seemed as though every set of eyes landed on him, and deepened when Dumbledore rose to announce to everyone that Harry Potter had come to Hogwarts.

‘Like they wouldn’t have known that in a minute or so anyway,’ he thought scornfully, then strode forward when McGonagall called his name. He eyed the hat with suspicion, but suffered to sit down and have it placed on his head; incriminating memories—his own or those stolen—had long since been tucked away, from the time that he learned of Occlumency.

Within seconds the hat yelled, “Ravenclaw!”

He was shortly seated among the allegedly intelligent students, who eyed him with disturbing gleams in their eyes, but were respectful enough to remain silent as the first years were sorted. It was when the food appeared that the boy next to him spoke.

“Welcome to Hogwarts. I am Anthony Goldstein, Head Boy this year.” When Harry merely nodded he continued, “Allow me to introduce the Ravenclaw prefects. Morag McDougal is the seventh year female prefect.” Anthony gestured slightly.

“Pleased to meet you,” the indicated girl said.

“For sixth year we have Emma Peel and John Steed.” Both murmured a welcome. “For fifth year we have Diana Rigg and Patrick Macnee.” Once they had given their hellos Anthony said, “If you have any problems or issues while at Hogwarts, please consult with a prefect first. They are here to not only help maintain order, but to answer questions and other things of that nature. If necessary they will direct you to our Head of House, Professor Flitwick. He teaches Charms. The Head Girl this year is Sally-Anne Perks of Hufflepuff. I’m sure you’ll run into her at some point. For now, however, why don’t we enjoy the feast.”

Harry loaded his plate and engaged in desultory conversation, asking several questions to be expected from a new student, then concentrating on his food in order to let the first years pipe up. He felt mild amusement at the guardian of Ravenclaw, and wondered if the questions put forth were tailored for the age of the recipient or not, but chose not to ask. He was very pleased that he had a room to himself, which was explained away as the necessity of a private place for each Ravenclaw to study, though each room had some kind of a ward on it which would alert the prefects if help was needed, such as in the case of an accident.

The next morning he was enjoying breakfast, only mildly distracted when a very short man—presumably Professor Flitwick—stopped by to hand out schedules. He was annoyed that Hogwarts did not have enough staff to allow for students to take all classes given, and resolved to take the NEWTs for Care of Magical Creatures and Muggle Studies anyway. It almost seemed like a conspiracy to make sure students were not well-rounded, and were forced at too young an age to decide on their future careers.

Then again, given that the curriculum of Hogwarts was skewed toward relatively unchanging disciplines, with little to no focus on classes which could enrich a student's life, he was not all that surprised. While chess might be useful as a way of trying to develop an analytical mind he had no desire to join that club. Nor did he consider the gobstones club to be of any use at all. And one sport only, which only had openings for seven students per house? Pfft. These people seriously needed to have a few lessons from the muggle world applied like a beater's bat to their heads.

“May I see your schedule, Potter?” came Anthony's voice from his right.

He slid it over and continued with his meal.

“Well, I'm in all of your classes,” Anthony remarked, “so I can escort you to them until you learn your way around the castle. If you'd like.”

“Sure.” Harry reclaimed his schedule and stuffed it in his pocket. It wasn't like he needed it. “Anything I should know about the various professors?”

“I don't know about the Defense professor as we get a new one every year. Rumor has it that the position is cursed. The only ones you might have issues with are Professor Binns and Professor Snape. Binns is a ghost and has a tendency to put people to sleep in his class. Snape, on the other hand, is harsh, perhaps because potion making is dangerous in the hands of those who like to fool about or are just plain ignorant. I wouldn't be put off by his demeanor, though. He's not the one in charge of the NEWT, and we do have in-house tutoring sessions for anyone having difficulties. And Ravenclaws tend to just ignore Binns and study history on our own. We've worked up our own study guide to indicate what things are likely to show up on the OWL and NEWT.”

While he was pleased enough to see that Ravenclaw house appeared to be at least somewhat sensible, he did have to wonder how it was possible for someone like Binns to even still be teaching. Surely people would have complained? The same went for Snape. Perhaps he should check through his ill-gotten memories again to see why someone as respected as Dumbledore made no move to correct things. He nodded at Anthony and finished up the rest of his meal, then followed the Head Boy off to Potions.

“Well, it seems our celebrity has finally seen fit to grace us all with his presence,” Snape had tossed out as an opener. “We’re all so incredibly *fortunate* to have you with us. Tell me, Mr Potter, did you use *confundo* on the sorting hat to end up in Ravenclaw? That is, assuming you can even cast any spells.”

It went downhill from there, with Snape taking points off him for the flimsiest of reasons, which outraged his house mates given that his answers were perfect as was his potion for the day. On the way to lunch Anthony said, “He really has it in for you. I wonder why? Normally we don’t have too much trouble with him, but I can see this is going to be ghastly this year. No matter, I suppose. We can make up the points elsewhere.”

“Now that I’ve experienced him for myself I have to ask if no one has ever complained about him? That isn’t teaching, it’s bullying and gross negligence.”

Anthony shrugged. “I’m sure the Gryffindor and Hufflepuff students have, but it doesn’t seem to have done any good if so. I wouldn’t recommend being out after a certain hour, curfew notwithstanding. He’ll probably find more excuses to take points.”

Lunch passed quickly enough and then it was off to Herbology, which went pleasantly. He ended his day of a mind to mist Snape the first chance he got.

Albus, using skills hard won over his long life, spent breakfast, lunch, and dinner covertly watching Harry Potter, wondering how he could help the young man vanquish Voldemort. Aside from being intelligent he could see no real indication of the “power he knows not”. And he had no excuse for calling Harry up to his office as yet, though perhaps in a week or two he could inquire about how he was settling in.

If he was as intelligent as Minerva claimed, though, the child might question his interest given that he had visited a grand total of one time thus far, so why care now? Still, the idea of even mentioning the issues of the prophecy and Voldemort to a child just now entering the wizarding world. . . . No, perhaps after he had been with them for longer.

Harry soon came to realize that many of the girls within Hogwarts saw him as prime marriage material. Or at least, he assumed that to be the case given their excessively fluttering lashes, how the rate of giggling increased exponentially, and how often they blushed if he so much as

even looked vaguely in their direction. There was one redhead in particular who seemed to pop up everywhere he went, as though she had bribed someone to get his schedule. At least she was a year younger and in a different house. Since the girls in Ravenclaw had some sense of decorum and the Slytherin girls simply ignored him, he had to assume she was either a Gryffindor or a Hufflepuff. He quickly made it a policy to never look directly at any female student unless they were the type to treat him as a person and not a meal ticket, and even then he was suspicious.

By the time Friday rolled around he was heartily sick of the attention. After breakfast he went with the others for their first Defense class, word from the younger Ravenclaws having revealed that Lupin seemed to be an all right sort. The second he laid eyes on the man he knew he was a werewolf and wondered how Dumbledore had managed to get that approved.

He personally had no particular issues with them, but he could not imagine that the bigoted pure-blood society of Britain would be so relaxed about it. Then again, the fact that there had been no rumors about his lycanthropy only served to prove that magical people—or their children, anyway—were woefully unobservant. The strange looks he kept receiving from the man reminded him that he needed to mist Snape, and perhaps he would check this one out as well. Later that night, after everyone else was sleeping, Harry transformed to mist and began wandering the halls, knowing that Snape often patrolled in the hope of catching students.

It took a week but he was able to ascertain the location of both their quarters, and was then able to mist each of them. Snape hated him because he was the child of James and Lily Potter, because James was a bigoted jerk, because he was obsessed with Lily, and because the man was not mature enough to direct his anger where it ought to go. He had, in effect, become something he despised: a bully.

Lupin, on the other hand, was a close friend of his father's, but Lupin was sadly lacking anything resembling a sturdy backbone. Not even friends who knew what he was and accepted him had given him self-confidence. Lupin was content for the moment to gaze at him from afar. If the man had any sense at all he would have moved to a country with less restrictive laws and made a proper life for himself. Harry saw no particular reason to bother with him.

Snape, however, was interesting. That man's sick mind brought about a number of ideas. The fact that he was allegedly a spy for Dumbledore yet was truly on the side of Voldemort made him more than a fair target. But not for consumption yet, oh no. Too easy, and too suspicious. He had a much better idea.

Not long after that (thanks to judicious use of non-wand magic) and Snape could be seen eyeing that redhead. Harry only witnessed it during meals, but had to assume it was also occurring whenever the girl had Potions. The girl, for her part, seemed to be distracted from her fangirlish mooning and was often observed giving Snape puzzled and almost irritated looks. Harry spared a moment to consider whether what he was doing was wrong or not, then shrugged. Maybe he should mist her, too, just in case.

As it turned out she was all set to use love potions on him if she wasn't getting the attention she thought she so richly deserved from him, along with his money and fame. That having been revealed, he spared it no more thought. Why quibble over screwing around with the lives of sick-minded minions and psychotic fangirls who had or planned to do illegal things? Even so, he would be checking anything he ate and drank from then on, in case she wasn't the only one.

The male redhead who glared at him constantly turned out to be her brother, who felt betrayed that Harry had had the nerve to be sorted elsewhere from Gryffindor. It caused him to wonder if the rest of that family was as mentally unbalanced as these two and was pleased he had never officially met any of them.

As time went by more and more reports showed up in the Daily Prophet about mysterious attacks, usually on muggles. His fellow students gossiped like mad about them, but never seemed to make the connection with Voldemort despite reports of the Dark Mark appearing, and a good many of them seemed not to care as it was "just muggles". The muggle-born students did not take kindly to that attitude, but their classmates had a curious blindness when it came to that, aside from the pure-blood supremacists.

He almost expected something heinous to occur on Halloween given the timing of the original attack on his person and the troll incident, but doubted at the same time, as Voldemort had been keeping a relatively low profile since the 1991-1992 school year. Harry spent several minutes, as he always did on that date, to honor the memory of his parents, and participated in the feast in a subdued way. Thankfully, his fellow Ravenclaws seemed to infer from his attitude why, and did not question it. Others, however. . . .

"Not enjoying the feast, Potter?" came from behind him, at the Slytherin table.

Harry shifted so he could easily glance over his shoulder; a blond with a narrow, pointy face was looking at him expectantly: Malfoy. "The food quality and variety is better," he said vaguely, then turned back to his table. 'How on earth did someone so tactless get into Slytherin?' he asked himself. 'Is Malfoy just defective? Not a good opener, in any case. Maybe I should eat him and see how his father reacts, and how it would impact Dumbledore. It's been a while since I've had a live one. Though, perhaps only if he already has the Dark Mark. After all, it's not a crime to be a bigoted asshole, just potentially detrimental to one's health.'

On the way back to the dorms he was annoyed to see a redhead pop up in his peripheral vision. A quick glance verified that it was the psychotic fangirl, and he was appalled to see that she had noticed his action. A dreamy expression transformed her face from merely plain to outright vapid, but it changed suddenly to one of irritation. He did not stick around to find out why.

He heard the next morning, courtesy of the gossip network which hummed with life nearly every minute of every day, that Red had managed to back herself onto a staircase which just so happened to begin moving, resulting in a fall that should have been fatal. She had been

rescued by her now ardent ‘admirer’ Snape. Disappointed that she wasn’t dead or laid up in the infirmary for a few weeks, he still wondered if that would switch her focus at all.

As it turned out the answer was no. Red continued to stalk him around the castle, and Snape became even more inclined to unleash vituperative rants the second he noticed Harry was anywhere in the vicinity. Thinking back on his actions and what he had learned from Snape’s mind he was inclined to find a way to flog himself silly for setting up a situation in which he played the role of James, Red played the role of Lily, and. . . .

Draco continued to toss out the occasional empty phrase, which Harry largely ignored, and things proceeded as usual up until a short time prior to the holiday, when Dumbledore called him up to his office. “So good to see you again, Harry,” the old man said once Harry had seated himself.

Harry replied with an arch of his brow, then said, “I’m sure it is, Albus.”

Dumbledore chuckled after a moment. “I wanted to see how you were adjusting to life at Hogwarts, Mr Potter, and find out if you had any questions or concerns.”

‘Hint taken,’ he thought with satisfaction. “I’m fine, professor. Hogwarts is interesting, but given how much I had read previously, nothing seems out of order.”

Dumbledore nodded congenially, then struck with a not unexpected, “I hear that you have not signed up to stay this holiday. Surely you would prefer to be here than return to the muggle world.”

Harry smiled blandly. “One requires a certain amount of familiarity in one’s life. I’m sure that as time goes by I will be able to integrate the two comfortably.” He got the distinct impression from the look on the old man’s face that Dumbledore could not for one moment comprehend the idea that someone could find anything about the muggle world comfortable or even desirable. But, looking back on some of the memories he had stolen, that made a certain sort of sense.

The man was questionable all around, especially given that flirtation with Gellert Grindelwald. Perhaps he should double-check to make sure the man was still on a vaguely even keel; if not, perhaps he could indulge in a little more torment of his fellow man. He nearly giggled at the thought, having come such a long way from his first kill as a demi-human.

“I see,” Dumbledore eventually said, though it was clear he did not. “Well, please do remember that if you change your mind you can always go to Diagon Alley and floo to Hogsmeade so that you could return to the castle. Though, you might consider learning how to apparate during the break—with a qualified tutor, of course. If you would prefer to wait, however, we do hold lessons here in the castle starting in February.”

Harry aimed a noncommittal smile at the headmaster and replied, "I will certainly think about it."

Dumbledore sent him off after a few more minutes of meaningless chatter, and Harry was pleased to escape.

He stayed at № 12 Grimmauld Place for the break, though he could have used one of the Potter properties. A trip to the ministry secured an immediate appointment to test for his apparation license, and he was shortly away with it, off to Diagon Alley, not that he especially expected to find anything interesting, nor did he have anyone he wished to purchase gifts for.

Red was around, but as Harry was in disguise she ignored him completely. He was browsing the wares of the magical instrument shop when someone outside screamed; Death Eaters had arrived, and by the looks of it, Voldemort was also present. Harry quickly devised a plan and disappeared back to the house, staying only long enough to change his appearance to one of the most recent Death Eaters he had killed, along with conjuring up an appropriate mask and cloak. Then he returned, appearing just inside Knockturn Alley, a fake wand in hand.

'Sheep,' he thought, shaking his head slightly. 'So many bleating people and none of them seem to have the brains to fight back or flee. No, they would rather flail around in a panic.' He shrugged and stepped out. Voldemort could not be seen so he waded into the fray, absently killing Death Eaters who got in his way, and eventually arrived at an apropos location. A quick spell later saw his mask get shattered off 'accidentally' so that Voldemort could see his face (and quite probably wonder where his minion had been all this time).

Indeed, Voldemort did spot him, a faint look of confusion flitting over his face, and then shock as Harry raised his wand and sent an overpowered severing charm which nearly took the man's head off; Voldemort was dead seconds later. Harry cackled madly, drawing the attention of nearby Death Eaters to the death of their leader, then disappeared back to the house, where he switched his appearance to another consumed Death Eater. A quick rummage through his potion collection produced a particularly pernicious poison, and he was off again, this time to Voldemort's hideout.

He chuckled a little; protections meant so little when one could steal the information directly from the holder of them. Nagini was easy enough to find and the poison was spelled into her bloodstream and tissues with barely a thought. She was dead in less than a minute, and another Horcrux had been taken out of the equation. Before he left he ensured his false face was seen by at least one minion, then disappeared a final time.

After cleaning up and having a nice meal, Harry checked over his Horcrux collection. All three were still viable, so he consumed Ravenclaw's diadem and Hufflepuff's cup; the items themselves remained intact, but the soul shards within were destroyed. Not bad at all for his first Yule holiday in the wizarding world.

The next morning he was treated to blaring headlines via the Daily Prophet, screaming out the news that Voldemort had not only been spotted in Diagon Alley, but had allegedly been killed, too. Minister Fudge claimed it was all a prank in extremely poor taste. Also of interest was the revelation that Ronald and Ginevra Weasley had been kidnapped during the attack—because they were from a family of blood traitors, as speculated by the reporter.

‘So much for that stalker of mine. I wonder if Snape is having fun?’

Albus called an emergency meeting of the Order of the Phoenix the second word got to him about the attack on Diagon Alley, thanks to Arthur and Molly Weasley. A surreptitious call to Poppy saw Molly sedated by sneak attack and carted off to the infirmary, and then the meeting was able to get underway. Tonks and Shackbolt, as eyewitnesses, were able to report on the events in question, and Arthur added his own information, which was admittedly little.

“So you’re saying it was a Death Eater who killed him?” Albus asked.

Both aurors nodded. “At least,” Kingsley clarified, “it was a man dressed like one. His mask got shattered by a stray spell, but I didn’t recognize the face.”

Tonks shook her head.

“And the body?”

“Taken away by the Death Eaters,” Tonks said.

Albus nodded, repressed a heavy sigh, and turned to Severus.

“The Dark Mark has faded again, so I must assume that it was truly the Dark Lord at Diagon Alley.”

“Does this mean that You-Know-Who is really gone this time?” Hestia asked.

Albus shook his head thoughtfully. “We cannot be certain of that. After all, he has already risen once from what was thought to be his defeat. It is possible he could do so again. He has obviously done something to ensure his survival.” He turned to Severus and asked, “Any idea of where Mr and Miss Weasley might have been taken?”

Severus shook his head. “I have yet to be summoned. If you remember, after his first defeat I attempted, on your orders, to access his headquarters, and failed due to how the protections had changed. The check I made after the mark darkened was the same. I must assume that any given Death Eater must be summoned in order to get past the wards at least the first time.

“That being so, given that it seems the Dark Lord has again been defeated, it is possible they have been taken elsewhere, such as the home of a Death Eater. More than one of those families has dungeons in their homes, as was customary for pure-bloods. I know for a fact that Lucius Malfoy does.”

Albus took a sherbet lemon from the dish on his desk. After tucking it between cheek and gum he said, “Will one of you share a memory of the attack? It may be that Severus will recognize the man you saw.”

Shacklebolt immediately set his wand to his temple, so Albus fetched out a small projector pensieve. Moments later the attack was being watched by all present.

“Reginald Higgenbotham, a lower level lackey,” Severus stated. “Not particularly bright from what I remember, but he was apt at taking orders and following them exactly. I do not recall anything which would have led me to believe he would turn against the Dark Lord.”

The meeting degenerated quickly after that, with the usual orders being given out to collect information and stalk certain people, and broke up in time for dinner.

Severus waited until he was in his quarters to laugh maliciously. Albus was such a trusting soul; all it took was a semi-believable, heart-wrenching story. He gathered up a few things and set out, ostensibly to carry out Dumbledore’s orders. On arrival at Voldemort’s headquarters he was surprised to find out that yet another betraying minion had struck, this time killing the Dark Lord’s familiar. Deciding that it was none of his business for the moment he proceeded to the dungeons where his dear Ginevra awaited.

“No! No, never! You disgust me!”

Severus snarled and backhanded the girl. Why was she being so uncooperative? Surely she understood the level of his devotion to her? Lily he could understand. The Dark Lord had been willing to let her live at his impassioned request, but mothers had a tendency to sacrifice anything for the sake of their children—even ones spawned from James Potter. Even had she lived he might not have been able to make her see reason. But Ginevra was a pure-blood. An hour later, after several lust potions and an extreme expenditure of energy on his part, he left his dear Ginevra to contemplate the error of her ways.

When he returned the next morning he was devastated. His dear Ginevra had committed suicide by clawing out her throat. Severus was so upset he stalked over to the cell Weasley was in and cast the cruciatus until the boy lost control of his bladder and bowels, then obliviated him and returned to the school.

Ginny Weasley, for once in her existence, had something to obsess over aside from the Boy Who Lived. As a ghost with unfinished business she could and would do everything in her power to ensure that Severus Snape got what was coming to him. Funny how being dead changed one's priorities. To that end she traveled quickly to the Burrow. Her parents wept anew on seeing her translucent form.

"Ginny, sweetheart," her father choked out.

She gave him a sad smile and nodded. "I can't move on just yet. I must tell you who."

"Who?" her father parroted as Molly alternated between sobs and wails.

"Maybe you should call Professor Dumbledore here," she suggested. "*Only* him."

Albus called another meeting to discuss any updates. Nobody had anything of particular note to say, partly due to how little time had passed, and partly because most sources were utterly clueless. The Death Eaters who had been captured during the attack turned out to be front line fodder, and thus knew very little of importance when it came to the Dark Lord's operations. They definitely were not among those from politically powerful families, nor those who had gold to bribe their way out of trouble with, claiming they were "under the imperius", and thus ended up shipped to Azkaban after a brief mass trial orchestrated by Amelia Bones. She, at least, had pushed through the use of veritaserum, and the prisoners were so shaken by the prospect of dementors that the truth slipped out easily.

Unfortunately, Fudge had waddled into the courtroom near the end of the proceedings, then threatened Amelia's job if she dared go after fine, upstanding citizens like Lucius Malfoy on the word of some bumbling idiots who were so deeply convinced by the roles they were playing for the incredibly tasteless prank they had pulled that they truly believed they *were* Death Eaters.

Severus had very little to say, also. "I stopped by Malfoy Manor, ostensibly to visit with Draco, and Lucius was nowhere to be found. Draco informed me that his father was off running some errands, which means he was out on the Dark Lord's business. I also visited the Goyle and Crabbe families, ostensibly to inform their parents regarding the near-failing grades of Gregory and Vincent in a number of subjects. In both cases the men were absent."

Albus nodded, a look of disappointment on his face, then reached out for a sherbet lemon. He paused, seemingly indecisive, then retracted his hand, empty of his favorite sweet.

"You lie," came a voice distorted by rage.

Albus looked sidelong to see that Ginny Weasley had revealed herself at his signal, to force Severus to confrontation.

“You liar!” she screamed. “I was taken to You-Know-Who’s hideout and you were there! You’re the one who tried to convince me you loved me, and I should love you! You were the one who forced lust potions on me, then forced yourself on me, repeatedly! Is it any wonder I killed myself? Traitor! Betrayer!”

Albus heaved a tiny sigh as Tonks and Shackbolt moved in on a boggled Severus—one knocked him out, the other bound him in place. “Please search him for his wand, any potions, portkeys. . . .”

Shackbolt shot him a look as if to say, “Don’t tell us how to do our jobs.”

When they were done Albus heaved another sigh. How could he have been so wrong about Severus? How could he have missed it? “My friends, we will have to interrogate him.”

5 : DEVOURS

Knowing that Severus was a Potions Master (who didn't know that?) and an Occlumens, Albus reluctantly agreed to a suggestion offered by Tonks, who as a half-blood with a muggle-born father had a lot more knowledge of the muggle world than most involved in the Order. The sensory deprivation Snape was subjected to not only induced anxiety, but also decreased his brain function temporarily. As such, when given veritaserum, he was unable to resist its effects.⁷

The whole sordid story came out in front of Amelia Bones, who had brought along specialty auror equipment to record things. Snape had never truly been on the Light side and had been playing Albus for a fool all along. True, he was obsessed with Lily Potter and had fancied himself in love with her, but more rational brains saw it for what it was, especially given how his creepy 'devotion' had transferred to Ginevra Weasley for superficial similarities in appearance.

They were unable to get the location of Voldemort's headquarters from the man, as he truthfully did not know where it was, and getting there required having been branded with a Dark Mark. He had been honest when he informed them earlier that Voldemort was necessary to regain access, but it was also true that assistance could be provided by one who was already in on the secret. Thus, Severus was able to enter after the apparent death of the Dark Lord due to Death Eaters being on the premises when it happened, so they were not stripped of the 'key' and could escort others in, such as the two prisoners and Severus himself.

Albus lost a lot of respect that day from the people around him. For so long he had insisted that Severus was on their side, could be trusted, was repentant, and worked hard to atone for his sins and mistakes, that finding out otherwise shattered many preconceptions and much of his image. However, he was determined to persevere and regain respect and trust, though he doubted that Molly would ever speak to him again, and Arthur was iffy.

He did not want to even think about the record number of howlers he would be subjected to when the media caught wind of this.

The Daily Prophet practically screamed at the readers the next day that Severus Snape had been arrested, which caused Harry to wonder exactly what had happened. It could wait, surely, for when he had returned to the school, though he supposed he could mosey on over to the ministry and indulge in a little memory theft. In fact, even though he already knew of the majority of the moles in the ministry, it might be worthwhile to know intimately if these people were victims of circumstance or were as guilty as Snape. And, as importantly, to know how to find them when the time came for the deaths to start.

⁷ Sensory deprivation is used for a number of reasons, both good and bad. [Wikipedia](#) has this to say, in part: ". . .extended or forced sensory deprivation can result in extreme anxiety, hallucinations, bizarre thoughts and depression".

Harry might not care much for the British wizarding world, but he was uniquely positioned to do something about the cancerous corruption fostered and bred by Voldemort, his people, and those like-minded. And what was left afterward? Perhaps it would encourage people of open minds to move to fill the gaps.

And, despite what Dumbledore might think or wish, Harry was not about to ‘vanquish’ Voldemort because he felt it was his duty, or that he somehow owed his fellow magicals something, or even that he was the only one who could. After all, a prophecy was not an absolute. He intended to kill the man simply because it was clear Voldemort would not let this go, and he could never get on with his life until it was done. The biggest drawback was the reaction storm to expect afterward.

He did, on occasion, wonder what might have happened if he had not been cloaked when Dumbledore had visited the first time. But then, had he not been, the old man might not have had to come investigate. Either way, his life would have been vastly different, and given how the students, staff, and the greater magical population of Britain reacted toward him, he was certain that different life would have been infinitely more aggravating, restrictive, and unsatisfying.

The next few days showed more headlines regarding Snape; it seemed that everyone was out for blood and the Daily Prophet was more than happy to fan the flames as high as they could go, and take potshots at Dumbledore for his role in things. Would they learn that the exalted were simply human, too? Probably not. All the more reason to consider leaving the country once his ‘predestined’ role was complete.

The Wizengamot threw Snape into a trial so fast one might think they were attempting to hide something. And it was probably true that most of the audience, for it was an open trial, were too much like sheep to see that the questions asked of Snape were tailored to show him in the worst possible light (with plenty of grey thrown on Dumbledore) without any questions worded in such a way as to shed light on their own foibles, failings, and outright illegal actions.

The start of term feast back at Hogwarts featured the new professor, named Slughorn, who was accorded a standing ovation after his introduction by three houses. Dumbledore looked to have a forced smile on his face, but again, Harry doubted many, if any, noticed it. His new hobby for the second half of the school year would hopefully cause Voldemort to pull his hair out in frustration—that is, if he actually had any.

Voldemort was feeling ever so slightly dissatisfied with life. He had returned to his headquarters to not only see far too many of his minions lounging around as though it was a gentlemen’s club (something he could unfortunately not correct just yet, but would soon enough), but also that his beloved Nagini appeared to be hibernating for some strange reason—or was possibly deceased. Of the prisoners taken during the raid, one was already dead and

the other was severely impacting his food budget if the gossip heard was anything to go by. And speaking of gossip, another one of his missing minions had been seen on the premises.

It took another two months for the potion and ritual to be in readiness—the first of March, coincidentally—and by then he was heartily sick and tired of seeing reports in the news of countless deaths of his agents in the ministry being murdered. Each and every time the killer left behind a calling card of sorts—a shattered Death Eater mask.

Was this the work of the same man who had effected his ‘death’ at Diagon Alley? All evidence had pointed toward the man being something of a moron, but. . . Was it truly possible that he had just never noticed the man’s intelligence and cunning? Had he become derelict with regard to his people? Arrogant and vainglorious? After a few moments he scoffed. How ridiculous! The man was obviously an exception . . . as was that other fellow. But that was it, exceptions to prove the rule.

The deaths and shattered masks continued to pile up, distracting him somewhat from his plans. He did, however, decide to magically create a taboo on his name. People foolish enough to believe Dumbledore would soon enough realize their mistake, just in time to die of it. It was simply too bad that Dumbledore himself was unlikely to perish given that his use of the forbidden name would most likely occur in places the Death Eaters could not appear without causing more problems than Voldemort wished to court.

Harry took the time, in between killing people to annoy Voldemort, to head on over to Lucius Malfoy’s home and check on the diary. It was, as he expected, nonviable. Thus, he swapped it with a duplicate and added it to his collection at № 12 Grimmauld Place. The only major project he had now was the final death of Voldemort, but that could wait.

He considered killing Fudge, but the man was valuable in a strange sort of way, and too incompetent to be all that dangerous. A lady named Umbridge, however, ended up dead late one night, a Death Eater mask shattered over her corpse. She was not one of them, but many people might suspect she was a supporter, even though it would be untrue. Umbridge was the sort to try to get Harry sent to Azkaban had she the slightest idea that he was not fully human, so her death was simply a way of proactively protecting himself. Others like her were dealt with similarly.

Harry also took the time to mist Voldemort again once he had regained a body, mainly to check to see if the man had created any other Horcruxes. That he had not suggested Voldemort continued to be unaware that his rebirths had rendered his Horcruxes nonviable one by one, and that he was now as vulnerable to true death as any other man.

A check on Dumbledore revealed that the man still had no real idea of how Voldemort had secured protection from death, though he was beginning to suspect Horcruxes as one method, possibly because it was the most easily available to study, despite information on them being difficult to come by. Certain books had mysteriously disappeared from the Hogwarts library,

only to reappear in the headmaster's private collection. The check also revealed that Voldemort had placed a taboo on his name. Harry grinned widely once alone at that information, and began planning times in and around his other killings to make use of such a convenient tool.

Nasty insects were easily enough transfigured into 'people' and used as visible bait in reverse-taboo traps. The Death Eaters would arrive, see the 'person' and begin shooting spells, never noticing that an extra Death Eater had also shown up for the 'fun'. Harry would quietly kill them, picking them off from behind, then burn the corpses to ash.

By the time the first of June rolled around (and with it revision week for the NEWTs), Harry had killed off a simply enormous number of Death Eaters. Voldemort was pissed, but also practicing something called Wizarding Logic—which is to say, next to no logic and precious little common sense, a common affliction among those who had lived too long within the wizarding world.

He spent revision week dreaming up things to do once he was free, and then happily enough sat his exams for the following two weeks. The evening before his final exam—Muggle Studies, incidentally—Voldemort chose to reveal himself by storming Hogwarts with an 'army' of his remaining Death Eaters, dementors, and various other nasty and malicious creatures. A poor showing, all told, with the exception of dementors. An informed and determined first year could handle many of the creatures, after all.

Beings boiled onto the grounds and into the castle via the forest, the sky, the front gates, and through various not-so secret passages (some of which Harry assumed had to be repaired). The students mostly began screaming and flailing around in a panic, causing Harry to slap quite a number of them and demand that they do something constructive, such as getting the younger years to safety.

With that out of the way Harry headed outside to see how things fared. Dumbledore was in the middle of a battle with Voldemort, and only the old man's deep understanding of defensive magical tactics appeared to be keeping him alive (and frustrating Voldemort at the same time).

Rather than do the heroic Gryffindor thing and leap into battle with plenty of warning for his opponent, Harry wandered up behind the fighting duo and coughed loudly. And as soon as Voldemort half-turned to see who was foolish enough to do such a thing Harry cast an overpowered severing charm, once again nearly beheading the man. Voldemort dropped to the ground dead seconds later.

Dumbledore gawked for several long moments, then turned to Harry, a look on his face of confusion mingled with protest. But before he could say anything at all, Death Eaters all around them began screaming and clutching at their arms. They, too, dropped to the ground, exhaling their final breaths on a battlefield of Light victory. The creatures, seeing that the tide had turned, were torn between enjoying the buffet of corpses and scuttling off into the forest.

“Harry!”

“Yes, headmaster?” he said, casually creating multiple patronuses to herd the dementors into a group.

“I—” Dumbledore stopped, apparently at a loss for words.

“I agree,” Harry replied, as though the headmaster had said something intelligible, “the aurors should be called straight away. And you’re right, the staff and seventh years can round up all these dead Death Eaters to help out. Excellent thinking. But, I guess that’s why you’re Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot and Supreme Mugwump of the ICW.”

Dumbledore shook himself like a dog and nodded.

The next day Harry took his Muggle Studies NEWT, a steady stream of derogatory comments running through his mind, and heaved a sigh of relief when it was over. He was called up to Dumbledore’s office the morning after for a meeting, and he went, rolling his eyes at the necessity.

“Harry,” Dumbledore greeted him congenially.

“Albus,” Harry said just as congenially.

Dumbledore coughed quietly and said, “There is something I should inform you of. I might have told you much sooner, but you were so young, and you have only just recently rejoined the wizarding world.”

Harry nodded and remained silent, knowing that Dumbledore liked to have people ask him questions, rather than just coming out and saying what he wished to impart.

The old man eventually continued, “You see, there was a prophecy regarding you and Voldemort, one which foresaw you as the one with the power to defeat him. And, while you have brought him down, it remains true that no one has ever figured out how he cheated death in the past. I am concerned that—”

“Well,” Harry interrupted, “is that *really* a concern? It’s not like the Death Eaters all died when Voldemort was defeated before, but they have this time. Doesn’t that say something about the situation?”

Dumbledore coughed again and twiddled with his beard.

Harry decided to overload the man with his unique brand of oratory, even if it was for an audience of one—unless one counted portraits. “Now, one could theorize that the first time didn’t count as he may have been protected by prophecy. And one could also theorize that any idiot could have cast a fatal curse at the man with little to no lasting result due to that same

prophecy. In fact, the same could be said of me if you think about it—but that’s not really the focus, right?

“I’ll put forth the supposition that in addition to the possibility of prophecy protecting him that first time, it was also a matter of me personally not casting anything against the man. I was barely a toddler after all, and no one is that precocious! However, when I stepped forward this time I did so deliberately, and consciously cast a spell which could have fatal results. If I am the one with the power to defeat Voldemort, as you mentioned, then that should be the end of it.

“Of course, it would help if I knew what this prophecy stated. Then I could be much more firm in my thoughts on the matter. Even so, even without that, that the Death Eaters all died when their master did strongly supports my theory, and also suggests that they were linked to him in such a way as to. . . .” Ten minutes later he stopped talking, pleased with the way Dumbledore’s eyes had glazed over.

When Dumbledore had not spoken even five minutes later Harry simply smiled and stood up, then left.

“Now, who do we have next?” Lucifer mused quietly, glancing at the list of incoming damned souls. “Tom Marvolo Riddle, also known as Lord Voldemort.” He laughed and flipped his long flame-red hair back. “How delightful! I shall have to ask him how that name change worked out for him.”

Albus eventually snapped out of it and was surprised to see that Harry Potter was no longer in his office. In fact, it was time for dinner. Had he really been sitting there all day thinking? And to what end? He realized, as uncomfortable as the truth was, that he had been completely unnecessary when it came to Harry’s defeat of Voldemort. All that time, all that planning, all those ideas on how to assist. . . . All of it was pointless. He had never in his entire life felt so utterly useless and marginalized.

He heaved a huge sigh, popped a sherbet lemon in his mouth, and wandered off to the Great Hall to give a speech before the food arrived announcing his retirement. The population therein exploded with chatter, and McGonagall kept eyeing him strangely, but his mind had drifted off into plans to own and operate a sherbet lemon factory, perhaps manufacturing them in different shapes pleasing to the eye. Or perhaps he could run a little shop or café selling lemon-related goods. He would hire only the best bakers! Lemon sponge cake, lemon tarts, lemonade, lemon. . . .

Harry snarled as he looked out the window of the Hogwarts Express. Countless reporters thronged the platform, just waiting to attack once he stepped into view. Ravenous hell-beast scavenging morons, the lot of them. A few seconds later his belongings were shrunk and tucked into his pocket, and he disappeared to N^o 12 Grimmauld Place.

“Perhaps now would be a good time to flee the country,” he muttered. “Maybe go on a world tour. Suppose I should wait for my NEWT results, even though I know they’ll be perfect.”

A week later they arrived, along with a notice from the ministry stating that he was being awarded an Order of Merlin, First Class, and would he like to attend a ceremony? He sent off a reply thanking them and stating in as many ways as possible that no, he would not, in the hopes that it might get his point across. And if not? Not his problem. After all, the Death Eaters were dead, most of the corruption in the ministry was gone, so the British wizarding population should be fine now, right?

Definitely time to consider an extended holiday.

— **The End** —