

“Dora,” Harry sighed as he stirred the next morning, smelling the vanilla of her perfume as he smelled her hair.

He opened them and smiled at the sight, blurry as it was, of her familiar, long dark hair as she slept on his chest. One thing he’d learned about her first time they’d spent the night together was that while the rest of her didn’t change as she slept, her hair always defaulted to her real color. He found it cute, being able to see that bit of her she seldom showed the world. It was curly in its natural form too, much like her mother’s. Kissing her crown caused streaks of pink to form throughout it, her consciousness returning to her a little bit, and he reached around for his glasses, wanting to see her more clearly, only to freeze when he didn’t find them where he expected them to be.

“Shit,” he muttered, and Tonks’ hair turned red as annoyance flooded her at being woken.

“Wasong?” she mumbled, half asleep, only to groan as she felt how sore her pussy was. “Too sore...wankit.”

“That’s not my issue, luv,” Harry chuckled, tracing his fingers over her back as she sat up.

Noticing the small puddle of drool on his chest, she flushed scarlet and grabbed the sheet to mop it up as she asked, “What’s wrong?”

“I think I left my glasses in the Chamber,” Harry replied, and she chuckled.

“So you’re stuck being blind as a bat until I can get them, huh?” Tonks asked, stretching her arms over her head.

“At the moment, you’re a very, very sexy blur,” Harry replied, making her snort.

“Well, it wasn’t as though we weren’t going to check on her about the moment we got up anyway,” Tonks said, grabbing her wand and casting tempus. “Wow, you really did a number on us, stud.”

“My back probably looks like Chiara transformed while we were there,” Harry chuckled, sitting up and turning around, and Tonks winced.

A few episkeys later, she was limping out of bed towards the door that Harry made the Room conjure for her. Opening it slowly, she peered inside, mentally preparing for the worst as she looked at their bedroom in the Chamber. After Harry fucked Chiara into a well-satisfied pile of goo, she’d begun to fear that the potion might be wearing off early and begged them both to go sleep somewhere else. Tonks had made a few jokes about being unceremoniously kicked out of bed after sex but ultimately stumbled back through the door Dobby had maintained for them with Harry. The two of them had then promptly passed out the second they crawled into the bed the Room conjured for them.

“Thank goodness,” she sighed to herself, immediately seeing Chiara tangled up in her sheets.

The room looked like a mess, but it was the sort of mess created by three horny teenagers fucking their brains out until they could barely move a muscle, rather than the kind created by a rampaging werewolf. The sun was rising, the night was over, and despite the fact that the full moon had shone down on the world the whole time, Chiara hadn’t sprouted so much as an errant hair. Smiling widely, Tonks walked inside and nicked Harry’s glasses before nudging the white-haired girl’s shoulder.

“Fuck Tonks, Harry, mtired,” Chiara grumbled, and Tonks laughed.

“Chiara, it’s morning,” she said, and the girl bolted upright so quickly she nearly headbutted her.

“It...I...” she mumbled, looking around frantically. “It’s morning?”

“You went the whole night without transforming, babe,” Tonks grinned. “It worked!”

Chiara squealed in joy, hugging her friend tightly before remembering that they were both completely naked.

“Chiara, after everything we did last night, I think naked hugs are pretty much nothing,” Tonks chuckled, and the werewolf smiled, hugging her more tightly.

“Us and your boyfriend,” Chiara purred. “Where is...hi there stud, see anything you like?”

“Sadly, he can’t,” Tonks replied, grinning at Harry, who was standing in the doorway, being careful not to enter, lest they lose the Room of Requirement. “Stevie Wonder over there left his glasses behind.”

“Who?” Chiara asked, and the metamorph sighed.

“A...blind guy...nevermind,” Tonks replied, going over and handing Harry his glasses.

“Thanks, luv,” he smiled as he put them on. “Chiara, how did the rest of the night go?”

“I slept the sleep of a woman who got fucked within an inch of her sanity,” Chiara purred. “Merlin, you were not exaggerating, Dora.”

“He is pretty incredible, isn’t he?” Tonks asked, chuckling as Harry momentarily looked like a rooster puffing up his chest. “*He had his first threesome before he sat his O.W.L.s; he deserves to be proud, especially after that performance.*”

They’d all been insatiable last night, Chiara’s potion-induced nymphomania spurring them on to an absolute marathon shag that had left them all exhausted.

“We should probably shower and get going before the professors start to worry,” Harry said. “They could check our beds if they want an update on how you’re doing, which none of us want.”

“Fair point,” Chiara groaned, stretching and grimacing when she realized how she smelled. “I imagine we all need one pretty desperately, huh?”

“Luckily the Room of Requirement can create a working shower for us,” Tonks said. “Come; Harry’s not wrong about how likely it is that the staff will come to him for help if you don’t show up soon.”

Chiara nodded and followed her friend inside, saying, “I’ll never repay you two for this. After all these years, I never thought I’d go a full moon without turning into a wolf.”

“I think you repaid us plenty last night,” Tonks smirked, taking her hand, and the white-haired girl sighed, feeling happier than she could ever remember.

“So you just slept through the night?” Dumbledore asked.

“Getting to sleep was...difficult for a while, for reasons I’d rather not say, but I didn’t transform,” Chiara replied, keenly aware of the fact that Sprout, Lupin, and Snape were all in the headmaster’s office with them, alongside Tonks and Harry.

“Remarkable,” Dumbledore smiled.

“Indeed,” Snape said, his voice oilier than normal as he looked down at them. “I’d like to see this miracle recipe.”

“The next time I see Horace Slughorn, I’ll mention your interest, Professor,” Harry replied, and the man glared at him.

“Horace will be back in England later today,” Dumbledore replied.

“So soon?” Harry asked.

“He’s elected to return a little earlier than he originally planned,” Dumbledore replied. “News of this first success will excite him greatly, I’m sure.”

“Hopefully the professor will be able to iron out the kinks in this version of the potion quickly,” Lupin murmured, looking exhausted. “You really felt none of the symptoms, Miss Lobosca?”

“None,” Chiara replied. “I did earlier in the day, of course, the tiredness, the irritability, the feeling like my very skin was wrong somehow, but as I took the potion, they went away, and then I went the entire night without transforming.”

“We still think it would be a good idea for her to spend the nights of the full moon in the Chamber of Secrets,” Tonks said, “but this went about as well as it could have. We have proof that not only did Elfwynn remember the recipe perfectly, but Hermione brewed it to perfection too, meaning that this entire first batch should work over the next few full moons.”

“You’ve ensured that it is under proper stasis charms?” Snape asked.

“Believe it or not, I have actually learned a thing or two in your class, Professor,” Tonks replied lightly, and his eyes narrowed.

“This is extraordinary, and you two, along with Miss Granger, are to be commended for what you’ve done,” Dumbledore smiled. “Miss Lobosca, you will spend the rest of the nights of this full moon in the Chamber of Secrets, and we’ll reassess things this time next month. I am deeply pleased to see you so well.”

“Thank you, Professor,” Chiara smiled. “Honestly, I won’t mind spending all the full moons down there. The bedroom is quite cozy, the bed itself is comfortable, and really, the night went great, albeit with a couple little hiccups along the way.”

“For as long as I’ve known you, you’ve always become so terribly withdrawn around this time of the month,” Sprout said. “It’s a joy to see you so happy; you’re practically glowing, my dear.”

Tonks coughed at that, trying to keep the smile off of her face, and Harry bit his cheek to do the same thing when he saw how she reacted.

“I’ll never be able to repay these two for the gift they’ve given me,” Chiara smiled, “them and Hermione. I just...”

She trailed off, tearing up, and Tonks hugged her, feeling her own eyes grow misty.

“Albus,” Slughorn’s voice came through the floo. “Do you have a moment?”

“In a moment, Horace,” Dumbledore replied. “I think we’ve settled things here. Please, excuse me. Yes, Harry, I will tell him everything.”

“Thank you, Professor,” Harry smiled. “Come, we can stop by the kitchens and get something to eat.”

The three of them left, followed closely by the three professors, and Dumbledore turned to his fireplace, waving his wand at it to unlock the floo port. Slughorn stepped through a moment later, looking perhaps a little heavier and slightly more white-haired than the last time he’d seen the man. He looked around the office, smiling fondly, and his smile widened when Fawkes flew in and landed on his shoulder.

“Hello, old friend,” he said, “and hi, Albus.”

“Horace,” Dumbledore chuckled. “Please, sit down. It’s rather early in the morning, but not too much so.”

“I know you’re always up with the birds, and not just because of this one,” Slughorn smiled as he sat down. Fawkes flew over to his perch a moment later, and the man’s face fell slightly.

“You should know that the potion Harry Potter and his friends uncovered the recipe for was successful in its first test,” Dumbledore said, and Slughorn’s bushy brows rose sharply.

“Truly?” he asked.

“A young girl here who was infected with lycanthropy as a child went the entire night without turning into a wolf,” Dumbledore smiled. “It’s a remarkable success, and it means that your new project can go ahead without delay.”

“Splendid,” Slughorn said, his voice sounding positively subdued.

“Alright, now I know something’s wrong,” Dumbledore murmured. “If this potion can be perfected and distributed widely, it will be a feather in your cap like few others, and yet you sound distracted.”

“Harry Potter is a Parselmouth,” Slughorn said, and Dumbledore grew instantly more serious.

“He is,” the headmaster replied.

“James Potter wasn’t a Parselmouth, nor was Charlus, or Fleamont, or any other member of that family that I’ve ever met,” Slughorn muttered, “and as for Lily...if she had possessed that ability, I would have learned of it. Severus would have known, and he’d have told me even if she chose not

to. He was a curious thing back then, and a muggleborn Parselmouth would have been cause for curiosity.”

“It would have, yes” Dumbledore murmured.

“Albus, are you going to make me come out and ask it?” Slughorn asked. “That ability travels in bloodlines; it always has, and not once in recorded history has it skipped generations. Beyond that, even if I thought Lily was the sort of woman who...might invite other explanations, the boy is the spitting image of his father, eyes aside. How is he a Parselmouth?”

“How indeed?” Dumbledore replied. “It is curious, as you said. Do you have any theories?”

“Damn you,” Slughorn muttered, staring down at his shoes.

“Damn me?” Dumbledore asked, his pale blue eyes hardening in an instant. “Damn me for insisting that you actually share what it is you so clearly fear? You wouldn’t be here at all, much less this distressed if you didn’t have a theory you were desperate to prove wrong.”

Slughorn gripped the armrests of his chair so tightly his knuckles turned white as he tried to force out what the shame and fear roiling inside him were making so difficult to speak aloud.

“His scar,” the former professor finally sighed. “It’s more than a simple curse wound, isn’t it?”

“It’s a wholly unique phenomenon,” Dumbledore replied. “I’ve seen my share of cursed injuries over the years, but never like it. It’s skin deep, so shallow that, if it were normal, it would have faded entirely long ago, and yet it is just as bright as it was the day it happened. It aches at times has bled even since that night and seems in some way to connect young Harry to Tom.”

“Conn...he’s not gone, is he?” Slughorn sighed.

“No,” Dumbledore replied. “He latched onto Quirinus Quirrell like a parasite a couple years ago in order to access the school.”

“So that’s what happened to the poor man,” Slughorn sighed. “Such a bright boy he was.”

“He was,” Dumbledore replied, “but then, we’ve both known plenty of bright boys who were corrupted by Tom’s charisma and shows of power. Back to the subject at hand, though, we have a cursed scar, the result of a magical impossibility, which seems to connect Harry to the man who caused it. Do you have any theories?”

“Before I reply to that, I have one question,” Slughorn replied. “Do you have any idea how it happened? No one survives the killing curse. It is pure, distilled, murderous desire made manifest, one of the simplest spells ever devised, provided you know what it is to take a life and have the terrible will to cast it. I can’t think of anything that could counter it.”

“The only thing that I think could is something equally pure,” Dumbledore replied, “in this case, the love of a mother.”

“Lily?” Slughorn asked. “She was a remarkably bright girl, but this...”

“My theory is that she laid a trap for Tom,” Dumbledore replied. “When he stepped into that room, she had set up a ritual circle he didn’t notice and when he offered to spare her life if she just stepped

aside, she offered her life in exchange for Harry's. He took her life, unwittingly agreeing to her terms, and then when he reneged on the deal by trying to kill her son anyway, the magical backlash is what killed him."

"Why in the world would Tom offer to spare Li..." Slughorn went to ask, only to go still as it dawned on him. "Oh, Merlin. Severus is the one who told Tom about the prophecy, isn't he?"

"Prophecy?" Dumbledore asked, and his old colleague gave him a flat look.

"I knew Tom Riddle about as well anyone ever did," Slughorn muttered. "I didn't realize what a monster he was until...long past when I should have figured it out, but I knew him anyway. He was monstrous indeed, but he was never a lunatic, and specifically trying to murder an infant is an act of lunacy. If he'd not killed James and Lily first, I might think he tried to do it to hurt them, but...no, he had to fear him, and there's only one thing that can make a creature like what Tom became fear a baby."

"Well reasoned," Dumbledore murmured. "You will, of course, keep that theory to yourself."

"I'm not a fool, Albus," Slughorn sighed. "Gratitude is also just about the only thing that could make Tom even consider showing mercy to anyone, and as Severus was the only one who ever joined his side who cared at all about Lily, the rest of that deduction was child's play. So Tom was destroyed, Harry left with only a scar that never healed, and now they're connected. I have a theory, but I desperately don't want to be even partially right about it..."

"Because if you are, then it means that Harry might be host to something that will need to be destroyed for Tom to be finished off for good?" Dumbledore asked, and Slughorn jumped to his feet.

"It isn't possible!" he exclaimed, pacing back and forth. "That...for it to happen, Tom would have needed to..."

"Render his soul so utterly unstable that upon suffering the extreme magical backlash that he did, a piece of it was shorn off and latched onto the nearest living being," Dumbledore finished for him. "Now how could he have done that?"

"Albus..." Slughorn said pleadingly.

"I knew the monster he was from early on, but you knew the scared boy he was too better than I ever could have," Dumbledore sighed. "Help me, Horace, help me save Lily and James' son."

"If we're both right, there is no saving him," Slughorn muttered, slumping in his chair.

Fawkes chose that moment to fly over to Dumbledore's desk and start trilling a tune meant to improve both their moods.

"I have a couple theories about how Harry could survive, but I don't know everything yet," Dumbledore replied. "You remember the sort of books that used to be kept in the restricted section, things put there by Professor Black, during his term. Armando never believed there was any harm in letting students access such things and thought that they should learn about the worst of the worst so they wouldn't be caught off guard in their lives."

"I still do, incidentally," Dippet's portrait chimed in. "I think you've done a remarkable job in my place, Albus, but I do fear that you coddle them a bit."

"That's putting it mildly," Phineas Black muttered.

Dumbledore silenced them both with a look.

"Tom would not have come to me with what he wanted to do, but you were his favorite professor," he continued, watching Slughorn squirm. "If we want to save Harry; if we want to stop Tom from ever returning to life, I need to know what he did."

Slughorn took a deep breath and slumped in his chair as he let it out.

"Tom Riddle is the most brilliant student I ever taught," he began, his voice sounding hollow. "It is deeply, terribly ironic that if he weren't such a monster, he'd have succeeded in his goals. He'd be minister today in Cornelius' place and already have spent decades rubbing shoulders with the upper echelon of the I.C.W. Our world might well have been his."

"It could have happened," Dumbledore murmured, gesturing for him to continue.

"He came to me all the time with theoretical questions that he was curious about," Slughorn continued. "Most of them were harmless, and even for the few that were questionable, he just made it seem like his interest was purely academic. I often joked that I was glad I managed to somehow steal him from Ravenclaw. Only once did I honestly question whether or not I should answer him honestly, and to my shame, I ignored my instincts. I'd like to say it was because I had gotten too used to indulging his academic curiosity and enjoying the discussions we had, but the truth is that I had become blind to the darkness in him, and for the rest of my days I will wonder how willful that blindness was."

"You weren't the only one," Dumbledore said.

"No, but I might have been one of the most foolish," Slughorn sighed. "It was the autumn of '42, and I had hosted a supper for my most promising Slytherins. Tom attended, of course, as he never failed to, and it went quite well. At the end, after I had sent the rest of them on their way, he lingered behind and asked one of the academics questions that I had become so used to getting from him."

"This was one of the dark ones, I imagine," Dumbledore murmured.

"The darkest," Slughorn sighed. "He said that he had come across a reference in a book from the restricted section, which he had full access to, that he didn't truly understand..."

Slughorn trailed off then, staring off into the fireplace as Dumbledore waited patiently for an explanation he'd wanted for years. Fawkes flew up onto the former professor's shoulder and started trilling softly, relaxing him a touch.

"I shouldn't have given him the answer I did," Slughorn said shamefully. Taking a deep breath, he let it out and said, "He wanted to know about...horcruxes."

"What did you tell him?" Dumbledore asked.

"I warned him that it was the darkest of magic, the most horrid, but he made it seem like he understood that and just wanted to know why it worked," Slughorn replied, not meeting his eyes. "I gave him a basic overview, and then he asked a question that disturbed me then and has horrified me ever since. He wanted to know if it wouldn't be more magically sound to create six of them rather than one."

"Six," Dumbledore sighed, leaning back in his chair.

"I...it was too horrible to even contemplate," Slughorn spluttered. "That question, disturbing me though it did, also, to my shame, helped me convince myself that we were speaking entirely in theoreticals. He was a teenager for Merlin's sake, still a boy. Surely he couldn't truly be considering murdering six innocent people at that age."

"He ended up murdering far more than that," Dumbledore muttered. "Thank you, Horace, for telling me this. You've clarified a great deal."

"He did it; the mad, monstrous man actually did it," Slughorn sighed. "It's the only explanation for how his soul could have become so fragile."

"I suspect he did," Dumbledore murmured, reaching into his desk and pulling out Tom's diary. "Do you remember this?"

"It was his," Slughorn replied, his eyes widening as he saw the jagged hole in the middle of it. "I saw him write in it numerous times as a...are you saying that this is..."

"Was," Dumbledore replied. "Harry stabbed it with a fang from that basilisk last year."

"The venom," Slughorn breathed, horrified by the confirmation he'd hoped never to get. "Goodness, what have I done?"

"You aren't to blame for him, Horace," Dumbledore murmured. "Tom Riddle was already broken by the time I met him, though even I didn't realize just how little hope there was for him then. I suspect that this was his test subject, a horcrux made with the murder of Myrtle Warren."

"That poor girl," Slughorn sighed. "We have to find them, Albus, while he's still a disembodied spirit. The basilisk venom..."

"The sword on that wall is imbued with it," Dumbledore said, pointing to the Sword of Gryffindor.

"Goblin silver," Slughorn nodded. "How are we going to save young Harry?"

"The best working theory I have at the moment is that a second killing curse cast by Tom, specifically, would destroy the soul fragment in his scar rather than kill him," Dumbledore replied, and Slughorn's eyes went wide as saucers.

"That...that's the best you've come up with?" he stammered.

"If you have any better ideas, I'm all ears," Dumbledore replied dryly.

"It's not a subject matter that I've given all that much thought before," Slughorn muttered.

“Tom is still disembodied, and that means we have time to spare,” Dumbledore said. “Knowing how many of them he wished to make will help, and if you have any ideas about what he might have used, that would be as well.”

“He wasn’t the most sentimental creature on Earth, and in truth, I never knew him to prize any particular objects, save for his wand,” Slughorn replied. After a moment, he added, “Actually, there is one thing...”

“Oh?” Dumbledore asked.

“When we came back the next year, he was wearing this gaudy ring,” Slughorn replied. “It had a large dark stone on it, and I personally thought it was a touch oversized. I asked about it, and he gave me a rather evasive answer.”

“It’s a possible lead,” Dumbledore nodded, trying to recall the ring Slughorn was talking about. “I don’t suppose you’d be willing to share your clearest memory of it.”

“Of course,” Slughorn replied, placing his wand to his temple and drawing out a memory he figured would work. “All I ask is that, if you think you’ve found a true lead on one of them, you take me with you. I contributed to the rise of the most terrible Dark Lord in living memory, and I would like to help correct that mistake.”

“I’ll contact you,” Dumbledore promised, conjuring a vial for the memory and placing it with the others. “I trust, of course, that you won’t breathe a word of this to Harry or anyone else.”

“How do you even go about telling someone something like that?” Slughorn muttered. “He’ll need to learn the truth eventually.”

“When he’s older,” Dumbledore sighed.

“I’ll keep mum for now,” Slughorn said. “I should get going; I have a meeting with Sirius Black and that ghost.”

“Right,” Dumbledore nodded, watching him walk over to the fireplace and pick up a handful of floo powder. “Thank you again, Horace; you’ve been most helpful.”

“Not as helpful as I could be,” Slughorn thought to himself. “There are things you wouldn’t ever consider, old friend, which might be necessary, given that Tom still lives. I think I’ll pay a visit to the ministry later and call in a few favors.”

With that, he spoke his destination and disappeared in a plume of green flame, leaving a genuinely surprised Dumbledore in his wake.

“It’s honestly comforting to know that, even in my old age, I can still be completely surprised,” the old man murmured, stroking his long white beard and contemplating everything he’d just learned.

“So what’s this surprise you mentioned?” Hermione asked, not for the first time, as Harry led her and Ron up to the seventh floor.

"I'll explain when we get there," Harry replied. "Tonks will have already set everything up with Chiara and Hestia."

"How did things go with her last night?" Ron asked, and Harry couldn't help but smile.

"Everything went great," he replied. "The potion worked as Elfwynn said it would, and Chiara was fine. Things went a little sideways thanks to Snape, but it all worked out in the end."

"Snape?" Ron asked.

"The staff didn't like the idea of us just sending her down there without some oversight, and naturally, he volunteered," Harry muttered.

"What happened?" Hermione asked, yawning.

"He went with Chiara and me down to the Chamber and then followed me back up," Harry replied. "They took turns guarding the place all night, apparently."

"Oh, so you and Tonks didn't manage to...observe her in person?" Hermione asked, blushing lightly.

"Funny you should ask that," Harry chuckled as they reached the tapestry of Barabas the Barmy.

"I'm fairly sure that door is new," Ron said, furrowing his brow in confusion, and Harry grinned.

"That's because it is," Harry replied, "or rather, it isn't always there."

With that, he opened the door, revealing the Room of Requirement, and he smiled at the sight of what Tonks had turned it into. It was a perfect recreation of her little sanctuary, save for the electric lights, and the memories it brought back made his heart flutter. She was sitting with Chiara and Hestia, both of whom looked stunned, and as they spotted them, the werewolf jumped to her feet.

"What is this pla..." Hermione went to ask, only to get cut off as Chiara kissed her.

Ron walked into a wall that hadn't been there a moment earlier, and as Harry cocked an eyebrow at Tonks, she mouthed, "*Couldn't resist.*"

"Bloody hell," the redhead muttered as Chiara let Hermione go, revealing that the brunette had flushed scarlet.

"Thank you," the white-haired girl beamed. "That potion, it worked perfectly."

Hermione opened her mouth to reply, and no sound came out; her shock at the unexpected kiss and flash of arousal having stunned her to silence.

"Where did that wall come from?" Ron asked, looking even more confused as it disappeared.

"This is the Room of Requirement," Tonks explained as Chiara sat back down next to her. "It's how Harry and I were able to get around our oily sentry last night to check on Chiara here."

"So you did manage to see how she was doing," Ron said, having recovered from the shock of seeing his only female friend kiss another girl.

“Yeah, we needed to make sure that the potion was working properly, and it was,” Harry explained, and Hermione finally snapped out of it, only to blush again when she remembered just what that would have entailed.

“Then you two...” she asked, only to shake her head and drop it. “Wait, how did this room let you access the Chamber?”

“This room can become anything you want, with a few exceptions,” Tonks replied, focusing on the room and having it take the form of the Hufflepuff Common Room.

“It looked like her bedroom when we first got here,” Hestia commented.

“That’s...that’s remarkable,” Hermione breathed, yawning and blinking a few times to relieve the feeling of heaviness in her eyes. “What are the limitations?”

“It can’t create eatable food,” Tonks replied, “and while it can create doors that lead to anywhere else in the school, it can’t lead us out of it.”

“We tried that just now, and instead of leading to Honeydukes, it just led to a recreation of it,” Chiara sighed. “Still, it’s pretty insane.”

“This is a magical wonder,” Hermione breathed.

“Can it create working brooms, do you think?” Ron asked, and the brunette gave him the flattest look he’d ever seen from her.

“Seriously?” Hermione asked. “We could explore recreations of the Hall of Mirrors in Versailles, the Amber Room in the Catherine Palace, and the entirety of Balmoral Castle, and you want to see if it can make brooms?”

“Yeah,” Ron replied like it was obvious. “We spend most of our days in a castle every year, but I couldn’t possibly afford to try out all the best brooms on the market.”

“How about we give you both what you want?” Tonks asked, and Hermione’s eyes went wide as the room shifted again, taking the form of the Hall of Mirrors.

It looked just like the pictures she’d seen, much to her joy, but before she could even thank the older girl, she heard Ron exclaim, “Oh, wicked, it works!”

She looked over and saw the redhead floating above the ground on a Firebolt and chuckled, shaking her head fondly as he flew off.

“Don’t break anything!” Hermione called out. “You wouldn’t want bad luck, now.”

“I’ll keep that in mind!” Ron yelled, laughing as he tested out the speed of the broom. “Bloody hell, this is even better than your Nimbus, Harry!”

“Man, this really is as beautiful as I’d read,” Hermione said as she looked around. “So other than violating Gamp’s First Law and creating paths out of the castle, this room can do whatever you want?”

“It seems like it,” Tonks replied.

“I think I’m going to do all my spell practicing in here going forward,” Harry said.

“No professors around, no Filch, and if we break anything, the room can just fix it,” Hestia grinned. “This is going to make preparing for N.E.W.T. practicals next year so much simpler.”

“Just keep in mind that having no professors around is a bit of a double-edged sword,” Hermione murmured. “It...ahh...would be best to do it in pairs.”

“Are you okay?” Harry asked. “You look as exhausted as I should feel.”

“I’m perfectly fine,” Hermione muttered, purposefully avoiding his eyes at the additional reminder that he’d spent last night in bed with not one but two older girls. “I was just up late last night working on that transfiguration essay.”

“I thought you finished that days ago,” Harry said, and her eyes widened slightly for a moment.

“No, you’re right, it was arithmancy,” Hermione murmured. “Anyway, I should get going. Divination is starting soon. Ron!”

“Do I have to?” Ron muttered as he landed.

“You chose to take the course, Ron,” Hermione replied, her eyes narrowing. “You could have taken runes instead, like Harry.”

“No, I’m good,” Ron chuckled. “You have to try this thing, mate; its top speed is insane.”

“You handled the corners really well,” Harry complimented, and the other boy grinned. “Later, you guys.”

“Later,” Ron replied.

“See you at supper,” Hermione smiled.

As they left, Harry turned to Chiara and asked, “Okay, why did you kiss her?”

“For one thing I was genuinely grateful, but I did have a second reason too,” Chiara replied. Turning to Hestia, she said, “I didn’t taste tea.”

“Shit,” Hestia muttered, shaking her head. “Harry, I want you to check your map for a second.”

“What’s going on?” Harry asked as he took out the marauder’s map.

“Possibly nothing, but Hestia had a wild theory about Hermione’s bouts of exhaustion, and Chiara here decided to test it,” Tonks replied. “You were supposed to just hug her and smell her breath, something your wolf senses would have made easy.”

“Kissing her worked even better,” Chiara replied. “I know she had tea with breakfast and there should still be traces of it on her breath just a few hours later.”

As Harry set the map down in front of them, still quite confused, Hestia pointed to Ron and Hermione’s dots on it and said, “Harry, keep an eye on these two while we search the rest of it.”

“I swear we’ll explain in a second,” Tonks promised.

“Got her!” Chiara exclaimed. “There, in the muggle studies classroom.”

“What?” Harry asked, noticing that Hermione’s name was indeed there too, “But she’s right here with Ron. How can she be in two places at once? Tell me she didn’t clone herself so she could take all the electives.”

“No, she did something much dumber than that,” Hestia replied. “When my sister, Gwenog, was here, there was a boy in her year, a Ravenclaw, who wanted to take all of the classes and was nearly talked into being given a time turner to make it possible.”

“A what now?” Harry asked.

“A magical device that can send you a few hours back in time,” Tonks replied.

“He eventually turned Flitwick down, figuring that he’d completely exhaust himself,” Hestia replied. “The fact that he could still take all the end-of-year tests, including the O.W.L.s and N.E.W.T.s, relying only on private study was what ultimately convinced him that the idea was stupid.”

“Why would the professors even suggest something like that?” Harry asked, his mind racing as he recalled all the times during the first term that year where Hermione almost seemed to have been in two places at once.

“I think it’s meant to be a practical lesson on the dangers of overextending yourself,” Chiara replied.

“But Hermione’s too stubborn to admit that she is,” Harry groaned. “I need to speak to her.”

“We’ll speak to her together,” Tonks said pointedly. “The fact that she went through an entire term like this, exhausting herself to the point that everyone who knows her became worried, and then decided to start it up again here means that a full intervention is likely our best bet.”

“Hermione Granger, studying addict,” Harry muttered, shaking his head. “Thanks, Hestia, for figuring this out.”

“It’s no problem, Harry,” Hestia replied. “You’ve made both of my best friends happier than I’ve ever seen them before, so this is really the least I can do.”

“I can plainly say I’ve never been happier, babe,” Tonks sighed, and he pulled her into his arms, hugging her tightly.

“The feeling’s mutual,” Harry whispered in her ear.

“I can’t believe I might never turn into a werewolf again,” Chiara sighed.

“So how exactly did things go for you last night?” Hestia asked.

“I’ve never been hornier in my entire life,” Chiara grimaced. “I was like a wild animal by the time they showed up, but not in the way I’m used to, so I couldn’t complain.”

“And the three of you just...what, if anything, does this mean going forward?” Hestia asked as Harry blushed.

“It’s not like we’re dating or anything,” Chiara replied, looking at Tonks, “and I’m not about to try and poach your boy toy, Tonks...”

“Much appreciated,” Tonks snarked. “We’re shag buddies, I guess, at least on the full moons.”

“I can’t believe this is my life,” Harry mumbled under his breath, and his girlfriend grinned at him.

“That’s what you get for being born half horse, Harry,” she teased, making the other two cackle.

“Half-Horse Harry,” Chiara giggled. “There’s a nickname we could use for you.”

“Please don’t,” Harry said flatly, making her grin.

“It’s better than the boy-who-lived, no?” Tonks asked.

That, Harry couldn’t deny, so instead, he said changing the subject. “So Slughorn got back early.”

“Really?” Hestia asked. “He’s the one who’s going to work on finishing the potion, yeah?”

“That’s him,” Tonks nodded. “I’m sure Sirius will write to us after he and Elfwynn meet with him.”

“I still can’t believe you ended up with a ghost roommate over the holidays,” Hestia snickered.

“And I didn’t even say humbug once,” Harry drawled, making Tonks chuckle.

“Our potions class will be starting soon, so we should probably get going,” Chiara said. “We’ll work out a plan for how best to tackle the time travel problem after you’ve let Ron know, okay?”

“Yeah, that sounds good,” Harry nodded, kissing Tonks. “I’ll see you three later.”

“Later, babe,” Tonks whispered, kissing him again.

“*Ministry mix-up sees Death Eaters kissed?*” Hermione read aloud a couple weeks later, staring down in shock at her copy of the Daily Prophet.

“Yes!” Neville exclaimed. “Rot in hell, you pieces of...”

“Mister Longbottom,” McGonagall called out from the high table. “While I can fully understand your sentiment, let’s try to keep our enthusiasm at an appropriate public level for this early in the morning, shall we?”

“Yes, Professor,” Neville replied, looking deeply pleased.

“A simple clerical error saw ten people executed?” Ron asked as he read over Hermione’s shoulder. “I mean, they’re Death Eaters, so screw ‘em, but how is that even possible?”

“The ministry is actively investigating it,” Hermione replied.

“Bellatrix, I know,” Harry replied. “She was, as Sirius put it, the worst of the Blacks. I don’t remember which of the Lestranges mentioned here was married to her.”

“Rodolphus,” Neville said, still staring at his paper like he’d won the lottery. “I think I might frame this.”

“Uh, Nev, you doing okay?” Harry asked.

“The Lestranges were among those responsible for...let’s just say they’re why I was raised by my grandmother,” Neville replied, his face falling. “I know she argued for their execution back in the day, though they were sentenced to life in Azkaban instead. She’ll be just as thrilled as I am.”

“So I guess these ten were the worst of the worst?” Harry asked.

“They were,” Neville nodded. “I might not have appreciated having the dementors around here, but I wish I could buy the one who kissed Bellatrix a drink. Excuse me.”

“I’ve never known him to be anywhere near that vindictive,” Hermione murmured as she watched him go. “I get it, but it’s still a little jarring.”

“I’m sure they deserve it,” Ron shrugged. “I know that Dolohov prick is one of the ones who murdered my uncles.”

“What?” Hermione asked.

“Mum’s brothers,” Fred explained, sounding more subdued than usual.

“Gideon and Fabian,” George added. “Mum picked our names, in part, to have the same initials as theirs.”

“We weren’t yet four when they were killed,” Fred muttered.

“They were nice from what I recall,” Percy said. “I get that these lot were terrible people, but this is still an appalling oversight on the part of the ministry. Some head will roll for it, I’m sure.”

“Do you really think they’re going to rake anyone over the coals for accidentally killing convicted Death Eaters?” Ron asked. “They should give whoever did it the Order of Merlin.”

“I will point out that if this had happened a year ago, Sirius would have been killed too,” Harry said, and the redhead deflated a little at that.

“We know these ones are guilty, though,” Ron replied. “They actually had trials.”

“Harry has a point,” Hermione yawned. “They...ahh...should have been executed back then intentionally, not by clerical slip-up. Look at Professor Dumbledore; he doesn’t look pleased.”

He didn’t look pleased, Harry realized as he looked up at the ancient wizard. In fact, Dumbledore looked oddly suspicious as he stared down at his paper, and he couldn’t help but wonder what he was thinking. That wasn’t something he could afford to think about just then, though, as Hermione’s haggard appearance reminded him.

The dark bags under her eyes had returned, already looking as prominent as they had before the break, and her hair was even more untamed than usual. She had been yawning since he first saw her that morning, as though she'd barely slept the night before and was looking worse by the day. It was Saturday, and they knew that they'd have as long as they needed to talk sense into her, something that he was hoping wouldn't turn out to be difficult as he feared.

"So, Mione, are you still free to help us with our charms assignment?" he asked, and she closed her eyes for a moment before looking at him tiredly.

"Of course," Hermione replied, smiling at him.

It didn't reach her eyes, and he was sure that she was far less willing than normal to help them out, overworked as she was, but he knew she would have anyway, even if they did need the help they asked for.

"Let's do it in the Room," Ron murmured, and she furrowed her brow at him.

"Why?" Hermione asked, her eyes narrowing. "I'm happy to help you both, as always, but I have no interest in spending my day trying to do that while you two goof off on brooms."

"There will be no brooms, I swear," Harry chuckled. "We can go when you're ready."

"I'm as ready as I'm going to be," Hermione replied, finishing off her morning tea. "Let's go."

As the three of them gathered their things and stood up, Harry noticed the empty spot at the Hufflepuff table where Tonks, Chiara, and Hestia normally would have sat, and it spoke to how exhausted Hermione was that she didn't comment on it.

"...still a ridiculous error," Malfoy muttered as they walked past him. "Father's out of the country for five minutes and the ministry is collapsing into complete incompetence, I swear."

"Someone's not happy that the mass murderers got kissed," Ron snickered as they left the great hall.

"Of course he's upset about that," Hermione muttered. "It really is remarkable just what an openly loathesome tool he is."

"Part of it might be that Bellatrix was his aunt in this case, but the guy's always been horrible in general, so who knows?" Harry thought to himself.

"Did Sirius' last letter mention anything more about how the potion's coming along?" Hermione asked.

"Apparently Slughorn is still catching Elfwynn up on the centuries of potions innovations she's missed," Harry replied.

"Seriously?" Ron asked.

"He's a teacher at heart, and she was a savant at his favorite subject," Harry shrugged. "We have a functional potion now, and bringing Elfwynn up to speed on the subject of potions in general will mean that he doesn't have to explain half the ideas he's likely already come up with to her as they work on it. It's not like time is really of the essence here."

“The setup with Chiara will be the same in a couple weeks as it was last time, right?” Ron asked.

Harry couldn't help but smile at that, remembering the three nights of threesomes that had come of the last full moon. “Yeah, though we talked Professor Dumbledore into doing away with the professor guards. I'll bring her down like last time and get her out in the morning.”

“Better than the old routine, I'm sure,” Ron said.

“Considering that that involved transforming and then running through the woods all night, I imagine so, yeah,” Harry thought to himself.

As Tonks had said, Chiara hadn't become a second girlfriend to him, or anything like that, and since the full moon passed, his life with his girlfriend had gone back to normal, but knowing that they'd be joining the beautiful werewolf in bed again the next time had him brimming with anticipation. He put that thought out of his mind as they reached the seventh floor, which was good because Hermione stopped so suddenly at the sight of the door across from the tapestry of Barnabas the Barmy that he nearly bumped into her.

“Someone else is using it,” she said. “Oh, well, let's just go to the common room and...”

“Hermione, come,” Harry said, placing his hand on her lower back and walking her forward as Ron opened the door.

Confused, but more curious than anything else, she went with him without a word, though once she looked inside the room, she went still again. It was a simple, cozy room, containing enough chairs for all of them, and having a banner displayed on the far wall that she noticed immediately.

“Intervention has only one R,” Hermione said automatically, looking at Chiara, Tonks, and Hestia, who were already seated there. “What's going on?”

“I told you so,” Hestia muttered, glaring at Tonks, whose hair turned red.

“We should have just gotten the room to make the banner,” Chiara pointed out as the metamorphmagus fixed her mistake.

“Yeah, yeah,” she muttered. “Get in here, you three.”

“Harry?” Hermione asked, not budging from her spot. “What in the world is this? I'm the only one surprised by it, so clearly it's for me. Did you get it in your head that I have a drinking problem or something?”

“No, we figured out that you have a time travel problem,” Harry whispered, and she paled dramatically.

“What?” she asked. “How?”

“The map, remember?” Harry asked. “Also, Hestia knew someone else who was given the same offer as you, though he turned it down.”

“Get in here,” Ron grumbled as he sat down. “If you're going to worry us all, at least let us chew you out for it.”

“You’re all being ridiculous!” Hermione exclaimed as she marched into the room. “Professor McGonagall wouldn’t have offered to get me a time turner if she didn’t think I could handle it.”

“My working theory is that the staff make select overachievers this offer to force them to realize on their own that they have limitations,” Hestia replied. “It’s a test, one that you’re failing by pushing yourself this hard, by the way.”

“I am not pushing myself too hard,” Hermione argued heatedly. “I want to learn as much as I can here, and they offer too many classes for me to take all of them normally. The time turner just lets me take an extra couple hours a week to sit in on all of them.”

“An extra couple hours, really?” Harry asked incredulously. “Hermione, you look like you haven’t slept in a week.”

“He’s not wrong,” Ron added as she glared at him. “You look and sound exhausted all the time now, and you were like this before the break too.”

“It’s just a little extra work, that’s all,” Hermione argued. “I had started to adjust to it before the holidays, and I will adjust again. The human body...”

“Needs sleep,” Chiara said softly, standing up. “Take it from someone who’s gotten barely any three nights out of the month her entire life; that fucks you up more than you think.”

“Why do you even need to take all the classes anyway?” Harry asked. “You do nothing but complain that divination is bunk...”

“Professor Trelawney isn’t exactly the picture of academic professionalism, but the class has some merits,” Hermione argued, though to her mind that sounded weak.

“The muggle studies curriculum hasn’t been updated since the reign of Queen Victoria,” Hestia said.

“Edward VII, and it’s honestly a fascinating perspective,” Hermione replied.

“He was her son, right?” Ron asked, and Harry nodded. “Hermione, you don’t even need to take all the bloody classes to sit the O.W.L.s. Bill didn’t, and he got a full twelve.”

“Professor McGonagall did mention that, but I’d have to study on my own anyway, so what difference would it make?” Hermione asked.

“The difference would be that you’d be living through an appropriate number of hours every day,” Harry replied, “and probably sleeping better at night. You can’t pretend that messing with time hasn’t screwed up your sleep schedule.”

“You’ve been intentionally jet-lagging yourself several days a week for months,” Tonks replied. “We never would have asked you to take on helping us find Elfwynn over the holidays if we knew you were this bad off.”

“I managed to help you just fine,” Hermione scowled. “I don’t know why I’m under attack for simply wanting to make the most of my years here and get the most complete education that I can.”

“We’re not attacking you,” Harry replied, resting his hands on her shoulders and staring into her eyes. “We’re trying to save you from yourself. You’re exhausted, Mione, exhausted and miserable, and you’re getting really bad at hiding it. You didn’t even notice that Dora, Hestia, and Chiara weren’t seated where they always are this morning.”

“I...it’s early,” Hermione said, shaking out of his grasp and walking away.

“The history notes you gave me to look through the other day after I fell asleep were half as long as normal and seemed to just cut off midway,” Ron sighed. “You fell asleep too, didn’t you?”

“Binns could put a toddler experiencing a sugar rush to sleep,” Hermione muttered.

“But not you,” Harry said softly as she stopped by the fireplace. “You’re tired, Hermione, so fucking tired, and it’s going to start affecting your work. You’re brilliant, more brilliant than anyone I’ve ever met, but you’re human and, as Hestia said, you have limits. It would be better to take ten classes and keep your sanity while still taking all the O.W.L.s than try to keep taking all of them and losing it.”

“It’s so hard,” Hermione whimpered, feeling her eyes grow misty. “It was a fun challenge at first, taking on so much more than anyone else, and I was doing well; I was pulling it off...”

“But then it got harder and harder, and that natural adjustment you kept waiting for never came, huh?” Chiara asked.

“Why not just stop then?” Ron asked. “I’d be completely cracked and picking fights with garden gnomes after a week of what you’ve been putting up with.”

“Because it would be admitting defeat,” Tonks suggested, and Hermione scowled at them.

“What am I supposed to say to Professor McGonagall?” she asked.

“Divination is bunk, muggle studies is a joke, and you’d really rather not go grey before you turn thirty?” Ron suggested, earning a venomous glare from her.

“I really do think this was meant to be a lesson and a test, one you can still pass, by the way,” Hestia replied. “Just drop your two least favorite electives and focus on the others. You can still take all the O.W.L.s and N.E.W.T.s.”

“I guess I’ll go speak with her later,” Hermione sighed despondently as she slumped in her chair.

A moment later it and Chiara’s chair turned into a loveseat, and the werewolf moved behind her.

“When I’m truly exhausted, I usually end up with a tension headache,” she said as Hermione stiffened. “I can show you something my mum used to do to help.”

“That’s not...oh,” Hermione sighed as she started rubbing her temples. “Oh, yeah, that’s nice.”

“Did you at least use the bloody thing to take the odd nap?” Tonks asked.

“I did, but that just messed things up for me even more,” Hermione muttered. “God, I’m an idiot.”

“You are very far from being an idiot,” Harry chuckled as he approached her. “You’re just stubborn, and speaking as someone else who can be rather stubborn, I get it.”

The loveseat turned into a full couch a moment later, and he sat down.

“Do you have anything due Monday that needs doing?” Harry asked, and Hermione looked at him like he’d sprouted a second head. “Silly question, I know. You are to do no work this weekend.”

“What?!” Hermione exclaimed. “But my runes assignment...”

“Is due in three weeks and probably just needs revision at this point; I know you,” Harry muttered.

“I was going to do a little more research to see if there was anything I could add,” Hermione huffed.

“Harry’s idea is a good one, Hermione,” Tonks sighed. “You’ve worked yourself half to death this year and didn’t even get to relax as much as you should have over the holidays because of what we gave you. Take a weekend to yourself and just relax.”

“Catch up on sleep too,” Hestia muttered, vanishing Tonks’ banner. “I’d say that went well.”

“I could have kept that,” the metamorphmagus muttered. “Goodness knows one of these days, we’re going to need to stage an intervention for the adrenaline junkie here.”

“I’m not an adrenaline junkie,” Harry chuckled.

“You put yourself in mortal danger multiple times a year, and that’s not even counting quidditch,” Hermione argued, making him snort.

“Quidditch aside, it’s never intentional, and I haven’t done it yet this year,” Harry replied. “Sirius didn’t end up being a danger; Dora took care of the rat, and she’s the one who fooled that dumb Death Eater too. If anything, we should be looking at her.”

“I just consider it early auror training,” Tonks smirked, and he rolled his eyes affectionately.

“Well, I need to get going,” Hestia said. “I have an essay due Monday that I need to read over one last time.”

“I actually do need to get a little work done on that charms assignment, but I should be able to manage it,” Ron murmured.

“It was easy enough,” Harry smiled.

“It was simple,” Hermione sighed, trying not to moan as Chiara continued her scalp massage. “I really should have realized something was wrong when you two said you needed help with it.”

“Well, your brain isn’t exactly firing on all cylinders right now,” Harry said, and she glared at him.

“I get it, I get it,” Hermione grumbled. “I’ll speak to Professor McGonagall before the end of the day about dropping, at minimum, divination. I think I might be able to squeeze the rest of them in a schedule that doesn’t require time travel, but if not, then I’ll drop muggle studies too, I promise. Merlin, Chiara, that feels amazing.”

“Scalp massages are something I’ve always found nice and helpful when I’m feeling the daytime symptoms of my curse,” Chiara replied. Leaning in, she whispered, “Back scratching works too, but I figure you’d rather not give Harry a show.”

Hermione blushed at that and looked down at the ground.

“So you’ve been walking to all those extra classes for months,” Harry said. “How are your feet not killing you?”

“They’ve gotten pretty sore, but I’d just soaked them,” Hermione shrugged.

“Rub the poor thing’s feet, Harry,” Tonks chuckled, and Hermione looked at her with wide eyes. “Since you’ve proven incapable of taking care of yourself, we’ll do it for you.”

“That’s right,” Harry grinned, pulling her feet into his lap as Tonks removed her shoes and socks with a wave of her wand.

“That’s really not necess...oh, God,” Hermione moaned as he, after conjuring and heating oil in the palm of his left hand, started rubbing and massaging her right foot.

Chiara moved down from her scalp and began massaging her shoulders and neck, and within seconds Hermione swore she could pass out then and there, slipping into a coma of pure relaxation. She actually did fall asleep before they finished, and Chiara had the room turn the couch into a bed for her, figuring she needed it. As they left her to her much-needed nap, sectioning off a little bedroom for her within the room, they sat down and smiled at each other in triumph.

“I honestly feared she’d fight us more,” Harry said.

“The girl’s exhausted, Harry,” Chiara sighed. “I doubt she had all that much fight left in her.”

“Well, it’s done, at least,” Tonks said. “Anyone for exploding snap?”

“Sounds good to me,” Harry replied, smiling as she pulled her deck out of her mokeskin pouch.

“I’ll silence the room so we don’t wake Hermione up,” Chiara murmured, drawing her wand.

They passed the next hour, just enjoying each other’s company and playing their game, hoping that a good nap and the points they made would help Hermione get back to being her normal self.

“Why the Black Forest?” Lucius asked as he looked around the quaint little well-isolated house in the German countryside that he’d been called to. “Greyback is wanted in numerous countries, but Germany is one of the ones most eager to see his head mounted on a spike.”

“Ze fascination vith zis forest isn’t unique to Greyback, Herr Malfoy,” Hans Dietrich, one of his most useful contacts on the continent asked. “For zose who fully embrace ze beast vithin, zere appears to be a sort of allure to ze region. Some have posited zat zis means ze curse itself might vell have originated at least around here, but zat’s never been proven.”

“Fascinating,” Lucius mumbled. “I’ve been in Germany for over a week now, Hans, and I am beginning to grow impatient.”

“Und here I zought my country’s simple hospitality might be enough for you,” Hans chuckled, earning a glare from him. “Oh, relax Herr Malfoy. I was close already to Greyback’s pack when I first called you here und I have grown closer since. My contact believes he will show up tonight, and so I zink he shall.”

“I certainly hope...Zeus?” Malfoy asked, spotting his owl tapping one of the windows.

“Zeus?” Hans asked, cocking an eyebrow.

“I was sixteen, and he’s the color of a storm cloud; be silent,” Lucius muttered, moving to let his old owl in and quickly taking the letter he was carrying from him. He smiled at the bird, old even by magical owl standards and yet still sharp and capable, though his face quickly fell as he opened and read the letter.

Lucius,

Something terrible has happened. For some reason that I still haven’t managed to ascertain, all the Death Eaters in Azkaban, including Bellatrix, were just kissed by the dementors. Fudge is proving even more useless than normal, claiming that it’s the result of a clerical error, of all things, and has so far given me no information. Rodolphus and Rastaban are dead too, so I’m her only heir, which means I’ve inherited her entire estate, and I remember you saying once that if she ever died, I shouldn’t go anywhere near her vault without you. I need you back home, now.”

Narcissa.

“Shit,” he thought to himself. “Hans, I need to return home; something’s happened and...”

“Leaving so soon, Lucy?” a deep, snarling voice rang out from the doorway, and Lucius looked to see the tall, broad, half-bestial form of Fenrir Greyback, someone he’d once hoped never to have to see again. “And here I thought you wanted to talk. That’s what this little pissant’s go-between said anyway.”

“You used my name?” Lucius hissed.

“No, but one mention of blonde hair and a cane and I knew it was you,” Greyback replied. “So tell me, what’s it this time? Has a new Dark Lord risen in England that I hadn’t heard about?”

“No,” Lucius replied. “I didn’t come to seek your aid but to deliver a warning.”

“Why the fuck would you warn me about anything?” Greyback asked. “You and I were never anything close to friends.”

“No, but this particular warning is one well given,” Lucius replied.

“So which jumped-up ministry official is sending hitwizards after me this time?” Greyback chuckled.

“Oh, it’s not any of the ministries that I’m here to warn you about,” Lucius replied, “but rather a new potion being developed, one which would be deeply irritating to you and whose primary benefactor is a mutual foe of ours.”

Greyback cocked an eyebrow at that and gestured for him to go on.