

Overcoming Prejudice

by IrishEspressoGirl

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Walburga Black didn't notice when the tall, pale boy slipped onto the bench next to her. Although she was going through the motions of eating, her thoughts were focused on a Slytherin down the table, a boy some four years her junior.

"Hello? Black?" The brown-haired boy waved his hand in front of her, snapping her out of her daze.

"What? Oh! I'm sorry, Riddle. I just have a bit on my mind. How were your hols?"

The question was generic, standard for the beginning of the year, but Walburga thought she caught a hint of something wild flash across his face. It was the same sort of look she saw anytime she slipped and called him "Tom." They never addressed one another by their given names; Tom was too commonplace a name and Walburga too peculiar.

"The summer was productive." He shrugged. "C'mon, Black," he said, changing the subject with a mischievous grin. "Let's get out of here."

She allowed Tom to lead her to one of the many hidden chambers he'd discovered; a small fire and cushioned-couch awaited them.

Although they'd come there to snog, she supposed, Walburga quietly pulled Tom's hand into her own.

"Listen, Riddle," she began, absentmindedly caressing the ring-laden fingers. She didn't beat around the bush, for she knew Tom preferred directness. "I'm to be betrothed in two summers' time."

Riddle stood abruptly, and although that mysterious wildness reappeared in his eyes, he remained silent.

"My parents have arranged it. Orion's too young now to perform the necessary magic, but they've taken the Oaths in his stead until he is old enough to complete the rituals." Walburga spoke dispassionately; she was resigned to her parents' will. The House of Black, the house of her fathers, must remain untarnished, and rather than she marry a man with no connections to speak of, a wizard bearing an unknown surname, she must wed her second cousin, a mere *boy*.

Riddle's gaze bore into hers, and she sensed he knew the true motivation for her parents' rejection of him. When he broke eye contact, Riddle's countenance changed to something resembling loneliness, and Walburga stood to comfort him.

He wrapped his arms around her, pulling back after only a few seconds. "I'm sorry that it's ended this way, Black," he whispered hoarsely. He leaned towards her and pressed his lips to hers, and in the brief, chaste last kiss, Walburga felt years of repressed emotion, mingled with a hint of despair, pouring from his mouth to her own.

Tom brushed his fingers over her cheek for the last time, and his unnoticed ring glimmered in the firelight.

"Goodbye," he said, turning from her to leave the room, his eyes now hardened with the same indescribable wildness she'd seen twice before.

Riddle didn't look back.

Walburga lingered in the room a while longer, and curling up on the couch he'd prepared for what would have been happier moments, she cried for the two hearts her family had broken.

Back in his own dormitory, Tom Riddle removed from his finger the ring that bore the Peverell coat of arms, the ring he'd obtained that summer. Despite its tangible proof that he was more than a wizard from an unknown family, the ring had not overcome the prejudices of this world, so he must overcome them on his own.

Tom pulled a small cardboard box that he'd had since childhood from his school trunk. Its contents were a weathered piece of parchment – his acceptance letter to Hogwarts and admittance to this world – an empty leather pouch, and a leather-bound journal. He removed the diary and placed Marvolo's ring next to the other items. His treasures were safe in the box; as soon as he had learned the required spells, he had bewitched it to open only for himself. The lid would feel as heavy as two fully-grown giants if anyone other than he attempted to lift it.

Tom replaced the box in his trunk and carried his journal to another hidden chamber, where his magic would go unnoticed. Opening to the first page on which he'd not written, the disillusioned wizard inked his quill.

13 September 1943, he wrote, Once again, the prejudices of the race have trumped all else. Never again will I be vulnerable to these beings. It is time.

After he finished the brief entry and the ink had sunk into the page and disappeared, Tom Riddle began the complicated spells and magic that would make him forever invulnerable.

Author's Notes: These events take place at the beginning of Tom Riddle's sixth year, Walburga's seventh. Timeline from [HP Lexicon](#), and information about Walburga Black, who became Sirius's and Regulus's mother, from [HP Lexicon](#).

The cardboard box that Tom has charmed is the same he owned in the orphanage; he used it to house the belongings he'd taken from those weaker than himself, so I figured it would be a good place to store Marvolo's ring once he'd realized it didn't accomplish what he'd hoped. The box is originally mentioned in HBP Chapter 13, *The Secret Riddle*.

Overcoming Prejudice was originally written for *Romancing the Wizard's Challenge Nineteen: Bring Out Your Dead!* the story had to be exactly 750 words, incorporate the idea of the prompt "a surprise ending," and include an original magical device. *OP* was the recipient of an Enchanted Quill.

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