

Future Perfect

by Doomspark

Fourteen year old Severus discovers that there's a very good reason why Time-turners are restricted.

Prologue

Chapter 1 of 10

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WARNING: Extreme AU. Do not read if you don't enjoy that kind of thing!

Prologue

Remus Lupin came into the Gryffindor Common Room to find his three best friends huddled around a table in the corner, snickering at something Sirius Black was holding. "What've you got there?"

"It's Malfoy's." James answered, poking it absently with his wand. It was a gold medallion shaped like an hourglass hanging from a heavy gold chain. On one side was an intricate serpent, and on the other a curiously shaped knife.

Malfoy's. That explained the glee with which they were, not to mince words, hexing it. The seventh-year Slytherin prefect seemed to derive especial pleasure in taking points from the fifth-year Marauders. "How'd you get it?"

"I raided his room." Peter replied, grinning. "I borrowed James' cloak and got inside when he left for class and..." he waved his hands expressively.

Lupin grinned. "I'm impressed, Peter! So we're going to hex it and then sneak it back into place and..."

"Wait for him to put it on." Sirius finished, clapping Peter on the shoulder. "Think of it as a delayed time-bomb. The beauty of it is that we'll almost certainly have alibis."

Peter smiled at Lupin's praise. He rarely took the initiative, and it was nice to be recognized.

"What kinds of hexes have you put on it so far?" By now Remus had his own wand out.

Sirius enumerated a half-dozen curses and hexes of various kinds, finishing with, "I don't think we should do too much more, or he might notice the difference." That was a good point. Some wizards could sense changes in the magical nature of inanimate objects.

"Let me do one more for luck," Lupin said with a somewhat evil grin, "and then Peter can take it back." Without waiting for a response, he pointed his wand at the medallion and muttered "*Inversus!*"

"What's that one do?" Peter asked.

James grinned and handed the medallion to the stocky boy. "If this thing had any magical use at all, Remus just reversed it."

"Oh my!" Peter took the medallion by the chain and vanished under James' cloak. "Open the door, would you?" Fifteen minutes later, he was back in the Gryffindor Common Room, playing Exploding Snap with Sirius.

Two months later, the Marauders had forgotten about the medallion in the wake of their first serious fight. Remus and James were furious with Sirius for the nearly deadly prank played on Severus Snape. Peter, uncharacteristically, took Sirius' part – though it was more due to his dislike for the Slytherin than anything else.

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"What?" Severus jumped to his feet in shock. Albus Dumbledore had escorted him from the infirmary directly to the Headmaster's office to 'have a little chat'.

"Severus, please. You must understand my position. If Mr. Lupin's condition becomes public knowledge, the other students might panic."

"What I understand," he retorted, "is that Lupin is a monster, and Black nearly got me killed, and all you're going to do is give Black a week's detention."

"It's not Mr. Lupin's fault that he's a werewolf. As for Mr. Potter, he did save your life – how can I punish him for that?"

"Fine. I'll take care of them myself since you won't." And he made to leave.

"Mr. Snape, if you walk out that door now, you will find yourself on the next train to London."

He turned around angrily and glared at the old wizard. "You think threatening me is going to change anything?"

"You're going to give me a Wizard's Oath to keep Mr. Lupin's condition secret. And you will not tell anyone the truth of why you were in the infirmary for two weeks. Or I will Oblivate you here and now, and send you home with a suitable story about your lack of ability."

"That's blackmail!" He didn't have to try very hard to imagine what his parents would think, nor what his father would do.

"Yes it is." Albus drew himself up to his full height. "Which is it to be, Mr. Snape? My patience is not endless."

Severus drew his wand slowly and spoke the words of the Oath. "There. May I go now?"

"One more thing, Mr. Snape." The Headmaster was still looming over him. "If anyone asks why you were in the infirmary, you will tell them that you had a dispute with Mr. Black and his friends which resulted in your being attacked by the Whomping Willow. I'm sure you can come up with a suitable reason why they should do such a thing."

Severus grimaced as he trudged into the Slytherin Common Room an hour later. His arms were piled high with books and scrolls, and he dumped them onto a table and began sorting them by subject. "Transfiguration. Charms. Arithmancy. Charms again. More Charms. I'm never going to get caught up on homework! And it's all Black's fault!"

Lucius Malfoy stepped into the room just in time to hear the last sentence. "Sirius Black?" He looked at the fifth-year boy carefully. "You were in the infirmary for two weeks, Severus, and the Headmaster wouldn't say a bloody word. And no visitors allowed either!" The corner of his mouth twitched slightly. "He caught me trying to sneak in to see you at least twice. What did Black and his goons do to you?"

The dark-haired Slytherin looked up and grimaced. "They hexed me from behind and dumped me in reach of the Whomping Willow. *You win this round, old man, but I'll figure out a way around it, and then those Gryffindor arses are mine!*

"You must have royally ticked them off! What did they think you did?"

I hate this. I hate lying to Lucius. He's been my friend for years. But if I tell him the truth, Dumbledore will expel me! Pettigrew told them that Lily Evans asked me to go to the Yule Ball with her."

Lucius stared at him. "Merlin's teeth! No Slytherin would even think about going to a ball with a Mudblood. But they believed the little rat and decided to, ah, teach you a lesson?"

"Yes." The one word released a torrent of overwhelming anger and shame. "They nearly got me killed, and all they got was a detention! They've been getting detentions all year – what's one more going to do? They never fight fair – it's always four to one. I've missed two weeks of classes, and I've got more homework than I can make up! I don't know what I'm going to do." He sat down tiredly. "I figured it out, Lucius. I can't catch up. There just isn't time."

The Slytherin Prefect raised one elegant blond eyebrow and flicked his eyes toward a pair of first years who were sprawled in front of the fireplace. "I think I can help you Sev. Leave your books here and come up to my room for a minute."

Lucius' room was up a flight of smooth stone stairs, and down the hall past the seventh-year boys' dorm. Severus had never actually been in it, though of course he knew where it was. He looked around in appreciation as Lucius unlocked the door and waved him inside.

It wasn't a large room to begin with, and the massive black oak furniture it contained made it seem a little smaller. Lucius rummaged around in the top drawer of his dresser, and finally pulled out a small green velvet box that he opened carefully. "This is a Time-turner, Sev." He explained how to use it. "This one is old – it's been in the family for decades – so you can only use it twice a day, and you can only go back one hour. But that would still give you two extra hours a day to do homework."

Severus stared at the older boy. "You're offering to let me use this?"

"Certainly! Slytherins have to look out for each other – no one else will! Besides, you can help me study for my Potions NEWTs next term."

A slow small smile spread onto Severus' face, and he nodded. "A bargain, then. Accepted."

They shook hands and Lucius handed him the medallion. "Don't let anyone know," he cautioned. "They're rigidly controlled by the Ministry."

He nodded again and went back down to the Common Room to get his books. The first-years had gone; the room was deserted. Severus hung the medallion around his neck and spun it as he'd been instructed. There was a brief spinning sensation and a wrenching feeling as if he'd used a portkey inadvertently. Then everything went black.

Brave New World

Fourteen year old Severus discovers that there's a very good reason why Time-turners are restricted.

A feeling of complete disorientation washed over Severus when he regained consciousness. Through a pounding headache, he blearily realized he wasn't in the Slytherin Common Room any more. In fact, he wasn't exactly sure where he was. He must have made some noise, for Madame Pomfrey hurried toward him. Pomfrey! Well, perhaps she'd put him in a different part of the infirmary. Memory returned, and with it the thought that he really couldn't afford to lose any more study time.

"Well, I see you're awake now. How do you feel?" She laid a gentle, cool hand on his forehead. "Your fever is gone. Good."

"I've got a headache is all. I don't need to stay here." He tried to sit up and winced at the hammering in his skull. It felt like a few dozen goblins were in there trying to dig their way out.

"That is for the Headmaster to decide."

"But Madame Pomfrey! I've got to study for my OWLs! I can talk to the Headmaster after exams, can't I?"

She fixed him with a glare. "You'll stay here until you've spoken with the Headmaster, and he decides what to do with you."

"What to do with me?" He was struck by a horrifying thought. "How badly did I knock myself out? Did I miss the OWLs?"

"No more questions. Now drink this. The Headmaster will be here shortly." She gave him a potion that he identified as a poorly brewed analgesic. He drank it, shuddering at the taste. He could brew better than that in his sleep.

Severus' analysis of the potion's quality was distressingly accurate. It didn't cure the headache, but it did reduce it to a more bearable level after a few minutes. Now there were only a few goblins hammering inside his head. He was impatiently sitting up in bed when the door opened and a pair of boys about his own age slipped in. He eyed them nervously, not recognizing them even though they wore the Slytherin crest on their robes.

"You're awake," one of them said. He was a husky one, and Severus mentally marked him as one to be wary of. "I'm Greg."

"I'm Vince," volunteered the other. He was almost as big as his companion. "We found you in the Common Room and brought you to the infirmary." His voice was both friendly and concerned. "You were burning up."

That jolted another memory. "Did you tell Malfoy?"

"Yeah. He said he'd tell the Headmaster."

"The Headmaster?" That wasn't like Lucius! And that thought brought with it the realization that Malfoy's medallion was no longer hanging around his neck. Hopefully Madame Pomfrey had simply removed it for safekeeping. Otherwise... to say that Malfoy would not be pleased would be an understatement.

Vince nodded. "We sort of aren't s'posed to be here."

"We wanted to see if you were all right." Greg added.

"Boys!" the mediwitch bustled over looking annoyed. "That will be quite enough! Be off with you before the Headmaster arrives."

The two shrugged. "See you," Greg said as they left. A moment later, the door swung open again, and a man he'd never seen before came in.

Severus sized him up quickly. This was an older man, clean-shaven, with raven-dark hair now going grey at the temples. While not handsome in any sense of the word, he was strong-featured. His robes were a medley of blue, green, red, and black that somehow managed to look dashing instead of garish. But the most noticeable thing about him was the unmistakable air of confidence. Severus immediately decided that this wizard would not be one to cross.

The wizard greeted Madame Pomfrey cheerfully enough, then drew up a chair and sat down beside Severus' bed. "Well, young man, suppose you tell me who you are."

He's probably from the Ministry... Dumbledore must've found the Time-turner. Oh Merlin! This is not going to be good! "My name is Severus." The man seemed to be waiting for more, so he added, "Snape. Severus Snape."

"An unusual name. Perhaps handed down through the family?"

Oh no. I am not going to involve the family in this. Father will kill me if I do! "I truly don't know, sir. I haven't delved into the family lineage."

"Related to the Snapes of Northumberland, perhaps?"

"Distantly, from what father says." Well, that was true enough.

"A fine old family, though not much given to collecting antiques." The wizard looked down at his long thin hands. "How old are you, Severus?"

"Fourteen, sir. Almost fifteen."

"Rather young to be playing with magical artifacts, aren't you?"

"Sir?"

The man reached into a pocket and pulled out Malfoy's Time-turner. "This was found next to you. It's a rather powerful item, and I wouldn't expect to see a student with one."

"It isn't mine." At the raised eyebrow, he continued, "I borrowed it from someone."

"Oh?" There was a wealth of overtone behind the syllable, and Severus felt compelled to explain a little.

"I was behind in my homework, and one of my Housemates offered to lend it to me in exchange for help with Potions next term."

The wizard's dark eyes flicked toward the Slytherin crest on his robes. "I would expect that from Gryffindor or Hufflepuff, but not Slytherin." He caressed the gold chain with gentle fingers. "How did you come to be so far behind in homework?"

"I was in the infirmary for two weeks. I got caught by the Whomping Willow." Without knowing what Dumbledore had said, he decided to stick with the cover story. "And we Slytherins know how to work together, which is more than the other Houses do."

"Ambition tempered with Wisdom – that is the Slytherin way, is it not?"

That was the first time Severus had heard it phrased in that way. He was more used to hearing his House described as "Get ahead at any cost". He decided he liked this wizard's description better. "Sir, were you a Slytherin?"

"I was indeed. Now, Severus, you present me with an interesting set of problems. You appeared from nowhere in the middle of the Slytherin Common Room, startling Mr. Crabbe and Mr. Goyle quite thoroughly. You had a Time-turner with you – a highly restricted artifact. Your robes are definitely those of House Slytherin, and you claim to be a student here. You know at least one of my staff," he nodded toward Madame Pomfrey, "but no one here knows you. So what are we to think?"

Severus' jaw dropped and his mind spun. "Your staff? But... but... Professor Dumbledore is Headmaster of Hogwarts!"

The older wizard laughed. "You'll have to do better than that! Professor Dumbledore was teaching Transfiguration when I was a student here myself. He left several years ago to take a job with the Ministry of Muggle Studies. I assure you that I am the Headmaster here, and have been so for ten years."

"You're the Headmaster?" Severus' voice spiraled up in shock.

The Headmaster looked at him for a moment, then stood up and extracted his wand from one sleeve. Holding it on his open palms, he spoke in a deeper voice than he had used thus far. "I swear to you, on my wand, my magic, and my name that what I have told you is so."

The Wizard's Oath. He's not lying. You can't lie when bound by the Oath. So... what does that mean? He scrambled for his own wand, and climbed out of bed to repeat the Oath in turn.

The wizard regarded him thoughtfully. "Most interesting. I believe we will need to discuss this with all the staff. If we put our heads together, we should be able to determine what has happened here."

"Sir, excuse me, but might I know your name?"

"Oh certainly. I'm Headmaster Riddle."

Revelations

Chapter 3 of 10

Fourteen year old Severus discovers that there's a very good reason why Time-turners are restricted.

Tom Marvolo Riddle, Headmaster of Hogwarts, was quite used to interesting problems. One could not supervise the finest school of witchcraft and wizardry in the world (his opinion) without coming across strange and wondrous things on a fairly regular basis. This was especially true when said school was so close to a place like the Forbidden Forest. However, this current situation bid fair to become one for his diary.

He explained the situation, as he understood it, to his staff. They were, for the most part, the finest minds ever assembled under one roof, and he had every confidence in them. There was a pause when he was finished speaking. Then chaos erupted, with each voicing his or her thoughts. Riddle listened, picking out snippets.

"A Time-turner! Really, Headmaster, the boy should be punished for using such a thing! Students aren't supposed to have them." That was Minerva McGonagall. The headstrong and stubborn Gryffindor was an excellent teacher, particularly in her field of Transfiguration, but she lacked people sense, particularly when the people were Slytherins.

"Oh Minerva, give it a rest. The boy has likely been punished enough already. Besides, he's not exactly a student here." Now that was, predictably, Lucius Malfoy, the Head of Slytherin House. He taught Defense Against the Dark Arts, and chaperoned the Dueling Club.

"The Magician! A most auspicious card, Headmaster." Despite working for him for nearly six years, the Divination professor still made Riddle just a little nervous. Sybil Trelawney knew all the tools of her field as any Seer should, but the one she excelled at was reading the Tarot. She had the cards spread out before her on the table, one long forefinger tapping the one in question.

"Pish-tosh!" Filius Flitwick considered Divination to be a field for charlatans. "The question is, what are we to do with the boy?" Trust a Ravenclaw to pick out the important point.

"He's got no past 'ere, Perffessor Riddle. 'e don't belong 'ere. Can yeh send 'im back?" Another good point, and one he was surprised Hagrid had thought of. The half-giant Groundskeeper wasn't the brightest candle in the box, but he had a heart of gold. He and Riddle had been at school together and served more than one detention in each other's company not that anyone else knew about that.

"Are you sure his Oath was valid, Headmaster? A powerful dark wizard might be able to fool you." Sirius Black, the Potions professor and head of House Gryffindor, put his two knuts in. That was something Tom Riddle hadn't thought of. He considered briefly and shook his head.

"I didn't get any sense of Evil from him, Sirius. I think he's telling the truth." He shrugged. "He's just a boy, and it would be highly unlikely that he could mask a Wizard's Oath at his age."

"Or at least, he's telling the truth as he sees it," Black replied. "We should hand him over to the Aurors and let them sort it out. He's not our problem."

"Tom, let's bring the boy in and question him ourselves. We should be able to determine if he's who and what he says. Then we can decide what to do with him." Ah, the voice of sweet reason. Argus Filch served as caretaker for Hogwarts. He might be a Squib magically speaking, but he had proved more than once that he could talk to the castle itself and that it would answer him. He was also an astute student of human nature, and very few wizards could lie to him.

There was a general murmur of agreement from the rest of the staff, and Riddle dispatched Lucius Malfoy to fetch the boy from the Infirmary.

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To say that Severus was bored in the infirmary would be an understatement. Perhaps 'totally, completely, quite unutterably bored' would be closer to the mark. So he was almost relieved when a crowd of boys about his own age shuffled in. There were eight or nine of them in Quidditch robes Gryffindor and Hufflepuff. Madame Pomfrey hurried over to them and clicked her tongue angrily. "Honestly! I'm going to recommend that the Headmaster suspend Quidditch if you keep getting hurt like this! Two broken arms, a sprained wrist, and who knows how many bumps and bruises. Mr. Pettigrew, if you don't hold still, I'll break your other arm." She began patching them up, whilst treating them to a non-stop rant on the dangers of this so-called sport, and how it really wasn't good for anything.

Once the minor injuries had been treated, three boys remained, all Gryffindors. The others had been sent back to their Houses. Madame Pomfrey shooed them into beds on the other end of the room while Severus studied them stealthily looking for Pettigrew's unmistakable fat face. He wasn't above getting some of his own back now that he

had one of the Marauders handy without his bodyguards. He was disappointed to find that Pettigrew must've sneaked out of the infirmary. It would've been nice to hex him. He was also extremely startled to realize that he didn't recognize any of the three Gryffindors; he thought he knew every student near his age in the school.

A tall blond man who stopped at the foot of his bed and regarded him with cool grey eyes, his arms folded across his chest, jerked his attention away from the boys. "Master Snape?"

"Sir?"

"Get dressed and come with me."

"But Madame Pomfrey..."

"Madame Pomfrey will release you from the infirmary for this."

Severus got out of bed slowly. "Sir... I don't know where my clothes are."

"Tchah! We can't have you meeting the staff in your pajamas." He looked around for the mediwitch. "Poppy!"

She hurried over, looking a little frazzled. "What now, Professor Malfoy?"

"The staff wants to meet our young friend here. He needs his clothes."

Severus wasn't listening any more. Malfoy? Professor Malfoy? What in Merlin's Name is going on here? He took the clothes that Madame Pomfrey handed him and got dressed mechanically, his head spinning. This made no sense at all. All thoughts of hexing Pettigrew deserted him. He sneaked another look at the wizard while he twitched his robes straight. He looked a lot like Lucius' father, or perhaps a much older Lucius; he had the same grey eyes.

"Excuse me, sir, but who are you?"

"Eh? I am Professor Malfoy. I teach Defense Against the Dark Arts here. Come along now."

He trotted along after the long-striding professor, mind whirling with confusion. Up until Professor Malfoy had introduced himself, he'd been almost positive that this was all some cruel and elaborate hoax set up by Black and Potter. But now he wasn't nearly so sure. In almost no time he found himself in a room full of adults. He recognized most of them, but a few were unfamiliar. The Headmaster gestured him towards a chair, and he sank into it.

"Now, Master Snape, suppose you tell us what happened."

"You won't believe me. I don't understand it. I don't think I can explain it." With that, he launched into the story. He told them about being in the infirmary for two weeks though he didn't explain why, and how one of his Housemates had offered him the use of a time-turner to help him catch up on homework. "So, I put it on, and spun it like he said. The next thing I know, I'm in the infirmary again and everything has changed! There's no professor Malfoy at Hogwarts. Professor Dumbledore is Headmaster. I don't know some of you at all, but others I do!"

"Interesting," Riddle said. "Who do you recognize here, and what positions do they hold?"

Severus looked around the room. "Professor McGonagall, of course. She teaches Transfiguration, and is the head of Gryffindor House. She's also an Animagus a cat. Professor Flitwick teaches Charms, and is head of Ravenclaw. Professor Sprout over there is head of Hufflepuff. She teaches Herbology. I don't see Professor Slughorn he's head of Slytherin and teaches Potions." He ground to a halt under the combined stares. "Did I say something wrong?"

"No, young man, you didn't. We're just a little surprised."

Severus whirled around to stare at the gaunt figure of Argus Filch. "I know you I think! You're Mr. Filch, the caretaker. But you're somehow different..." He couldn't think of a tactful way to say "you're not scowling".

"Go on, Master Snape," Professor Malfoy said. "Who else do you know here?"

"Hagrid the Groundskeeper, and Madame Pomfrey, the school mediwitch. No one else." He looked at the floor for a long minute. "I don't understand what's going on." It was almost a wail.

"What year are you in at Hogwarts?" asked Professor McGonagall gently.

"Fifth year, professor." The softly spoken question made Severus feel just a little better.

"Who's your best friend at school?" Professor Sprout asked.

"Slytherins don't have friends. At best we have temporary allies."

Professor Malfoy looked a little annoyed. "I'm not sure I care for that generalization."

"Sorry, professor," Severus apologized quickly, not wanting any of these adults angry with him. A thought struck him. "You're one of the real oddities here, sir. The only Malfoy in Hogwarts that I know is Lucius the seventh-year prefect."

"My name is Lucius, and I was indeed a prefect in my seventh year here at Hogwarts but that was in 1975."

Severus' jaw dropped, and he opened and closed his mouth a few times. Finally, in a tiny voice, he whispered, "What is today's date?" Someone handed him a copy of the Daily Prophet and let him read the headlines. "Oh Merlin!" He swallowed hard. "The time turner must have thrown me into the future! It was 1975 when I used it, and now I'm in 1996!"

The Time-Turner

Chapter 4 of 10

Fourteen year old Severus discovers that there's a very good reason why Time-turners are restricted.

The Time Turner

"Everyone has heard of the paradox of time travel," Riddle said after the uproar subsided, "where you alter the future by changing your past. This is, of course, why it's highly regulated by the Ministry of Magic. However, what we have here is unprecedented as far as I know. Travel into the future is supposed to be impossible because you can't go to a when that hasn't happened yet. You don't have any references."

"Have we really examined his time turner?" one of the professors asked. "It might give us some clue as to what happened, and how to send him back."

"Twenty-one years is a very long time," Flitwick answered. "The best time turners we have today only go back five years. Perhaps six. I don't think we can send this young man back further than that. And I don't think we should try. However, I do agree that we should study the device that brought him here."

The Headmaster nodded. "Here it is. What do you all make of it?" He handed the medallion to Malfoy,

Malfoy's eyes rose as he studied the time turner. "This has the Malfoy crest on it!" He turned to look at Severus, who wouldn't meet his eyes. "Was it this prefect who shares my name who lent this to you?" His fingers traced the serpent coiled around the hourglass for a moment and then set it down on the table.

Merlin's teeth! This Malfoy was just as sharp as his counterpart. "Yes," he mumbled. "Lucius let me borrow it."

"By my seventh year, I certainly knew that time turners were regulated. We should probably assume that the other Lucius does or did also. So he gave you this time turner to use. Now from what you've said of Slytherin in your time, it is a hotbed of treachery. Is it possible he was trying to get you expelled?"

"I... I don't think so, sir. We Lucius and I made a bargain. He wanted help with his Potions NEWTs next term."

A dark-haired, bearded wizard had picked up the medallion while they were talking and looked at it. "I suppose we shouldn't try using it again?"

"Absolutely not!" It was hard to tell who'd said it first Riddle or McGonagall. The Transfiguration professor continued, "Sirius Black, you haven't changed a bit since you were in school. We don't dare try it again. Certainly not without examining it first!"

Sirius Black! It couldn't be! Severus gritted his teeth and tried to remind himself that this Sirius wasn't the one who'd nearly killed him. His stomach churned madly, and he swallowed hard. *No! This isn't him! They just have the same name!* His stomach wasn't interested in listening to logic. Out of the corner of one eye, he caught Malfoy watching him. Professor Black sat down again with injured dignity, and Professor Flitwick took the floor.

"There is a theory it's only a theory right now that states that there are an infinite number of time streams in existence. When you travel through time, you actually change time streams." He thought for a moment and drew several long parallel lines on the tabletop with his wand. The lines promptly began glowing an electric blue. "This is simplified, of course. Let's say that this middle line here is the one we are in." He tapped the middle of the line in question with a gnarled forefinger and a white spot appeared "The streams on either side of it are quite similar. In fact, they might be extremely difficult to distinguish. But as one gets further and further away from one's original stream, the differences become greater and greater. The point of divergence goes further and further back." He tapped the end of another line and another white spot appeared.

"Point of divergence?" Sprout asked, studying the lines.

"That's the point in time where things start to become different between any two time streams. Now, time turners work to keep you from getting too far from your original path. But here's the interesting part: it's speculated that once you make a journey through time, you can NEVER get back to your original track. Oh you might get very, very close, especially with a time turner. But it would never be exactly the same."

He steepled his fingers in front of him. "If this is correct, and all evidence points to it being so, then we cannot return Master Snape to his original time. We might be able to get him to something close to it, but it would be far in his future. That would bring up the paradox of meeting one's self and current theory is that such a meeting would be catastrophic."

"So Filius, you're saying that Master Snape is trapped here permanently?"

"Headmaster, I'm saying that attempting to relocate him to something closer to what he remembers could potentially cause a great deal of trouble and has very little chance of succeeding."

"We should at least try!" said Black. "What's the harm?"

"Plenty," Malfoy answered sharply. "I sometimes wonder if you truly listen to anything that's said here, Sirius. No one knows what might happen, and I would rather not be responsible for sending a fourteen year old boy into what might be his death!"

"Lucius!" The Headmaster's voice cracked over Black's outraged sputtering. "Control yourself. Sirius, Lucius is right. We cannot send this young man back like he is so much misdirected post."

Black muttered something under his breath, but he subsided.

"Very well," Pomona Sprout interjected in a no-nonsense tone. "We won't send him back. At least, not until we're sure no harm will be done. So, what do we do with him?" She pushed her hat back. "He's a minor by wizard law, and will need an adult to be responsible for him."

The adults exchanged glances. "Perhaps an orphanage..." began Professor Black, only to be cut off again, this time by Madame Pomfrey.

"Orphanage! Sirius Black, that is the most ridiculous thing you've ever suggested! This young man is almost an adult, and he's gone through quite a shock! The last thing we should do is send him away!"

"I will stand as his legal guardian," said Professor Malfoy. "if he is willing. I have no family to consult on the matter, and I am quite secure financially. His care will be no hardship for me."

Severus looked down at the floor. "I don't want to be any trouble."

"Trouble? You won't be trouble. It will take time to get used to things, but that isn't trouble. Come, give Malfoy Manor a try for a week or two. If you can't abide it, we'll find somewhere else for you to stay."

Filch cleared his throat. "There is also the matter of what we tell the other students. Rumors are already flying about the Slytherin Common Room, and will probably have spread to the other Houses by the end of the day."

"Oh what a tangled web we'll weave..." Riddle misquoted, running a hand through his hair. "Argus makes a good point. We need to agree on an explanation that's plausible, easy to remember, and cannot be challenged easily." He looked around the room. "And someone needs to make sure that Madame Hooch is also informed of this situation. Where is Rolanda anyway?"

"Diagon Alley, buying Quidditch supplies," Sirius replied. "I'll let her know."

"Could I be a transfer student from Durmstrang perhaps?" Severus offered.

The Charms professor studied him for a moment. "Young man, with your accent, there's no passing you off as anything other than a native of Devonshire. But it was a good thought nonetheless."

"He could be my cousin," Malfoy offered. "It's a nice non-specific relationship. There are at least two cadet branches of the Malfoy family in Devonshire. Home-schooled, and now attending Hogwarts..."

"...while my parents are in America doing some unspecified research." Severus finished.

"If you're going to be staying with Professor Malfoy over the summer, that story will give you some credence."

"Your appearance in the Common Room will be harder to explain though." Filch leaned back in his chair and stared at the ceiling. "You can't Apparate on school grounds. Perhaps an accident with the Floo network?"

"You were trying to Floo to the Front Gatehouse, and wound up in the Slytherin Common room by mistake. That could work." Riddle nodded. "Argus, you'll have to break the Floo network so I can have the Ministry of Magic come in and fix it."

"You can't Floo to Hogwarts!" Severus exclaimed. "It was disconnected years ago! I read it in Hogwarts: A History..." he trailed off as the faculty stared at him.

"We've been on the Floo network for years, Master Snape," Riddle said gently. "Ever since it was built, in fact."

Severus shook his head. "This isn't going to work. Everything is so different here! How'm I going to manage?"

Malfoy placed one hand gently on his shoulder. "We," he emphasized the pronoun, "will have to spend a good deal of the summer bringing you up to date. I think we should relocate to Malfoy Manor today."

"What 'ouse will 'e be in, Perfessor?"

"Slytherin, of course, Rubeus." Riddle's voice cut over the babble. "I see no reason to undergo a public Sorting."

Memory Lane

Chapter 5 of 10

****WARNING**** This chapter contains strong references to non-consensual sex.

Fourteen year old Severus discovers that there's a very good reason why Time-turners are restricted.

Chapter Four Memory Lane

"Now remember, boy, you do anything to embarrass us in front of the Malfoys and I'll make you wish you'd never been born. I'll skin you alive." The elder Snape glared at his son where he stood shivering in his worn cloak. "Take that cloak off! Now!" He fingered the heavy leather belt he wore, almost as if he wished his son would disobey.

Six year old Severus slowly complied, folding it over his arm to hide the threadbare spots and patches. Nothing could disguise the hem that had been let down at least twice, but hopefully no one would notice. A draft from the broken window whipped around his unprotected ears and slid icy fingers down the back of his neck. He shivered again and stared at the window. His distorted reflection stared back: tall for his age and skinny, with shoulder-length black hair that contrasted with the pallor of his skin. The fine details of his features were too blurry to make out, but there was an impression of finely arched dark eyebrows, dark eyes, and a prominent nose all set in a pale thin face.

Tiberius Snape twitched his robes - the finest he had - into more perfect folds, and favored his son with another glare. "You're only coming because Mr. Malfoy suggested I bring you along. His son is about your age."

"I know Severus will play nicely with Master Malfoy." Livia Snape said, taking her husband's arm and giving her son one of those looks that said he'd better play nicely. "We must leave now, or we'll be late."

Tiberius twisted one hand in Severus' collar and they Apparated to the polished marble pathway in front of Malfoy Manor. As they walked up to the house - the mansion - he released the boy with another growled warning to behave.

The manor was huge. Beyond huge! Severus almost forgot how cold he was as he stared at the house. How did they manage to keep from getting lost in such a huge place? Now his father was hustling him toward the front door, where a house elf stood waiting to take their cloaks. He'd heard of them, but never seen one before, and stopped to take another look.

"Severus!"

The warning tone in his mother's voice reached him, and he hastened back to his parents. Fortunately his father hadn't noticed his distraction, busy looking for their hosts. Now a tall man with long blond hair was coming towards them.

"Ah, Tiberius! So glad you could come! And the family as well! Be welcome to Malfoy Manor!"

Tiberius smirked slightly. "Aloysius, may I present my wife Livia, and my son Severus."

"So enchanted to make your acquaintance at last, Mr. Malfoy!" Livia preened as Aloysius bowed over her hand, "Tiberius has often mentioned you."

Severus didn't know what to do, so he simply nodded as the other wizard's grey eyes fell upon him. Fascinating grey eyes, that looked right through him. For some reason, that was almost more terrifying than the beatings his father gave him. The eyes flickered over him from head to foot, missing nothing. They saw the hand-shaped bruise on

his forearm where Tiberius had seized him a week ago. They saw his ears chafed and reddened from the wind. For a moment, the grey eyes flashed over to Tiberius and then back.

"How old are you, young Severus?"

He was saved from having to answer by a small tornado that whirled among the guests and came to rest in front of him where it was revealed to be a boy a couple of years older than he was. His blond hair was tousled, and his robes were askew as if he'd put them on helter-skelter. "I'm Lucius. Glad to meet you."

"Lucius! Is that how I've taught you to greet guests?"

The boy looked up at his father with a cheeky grin. "No, sir."

Severus almost winced, expecting Lucius to be immediately backhanded across the room. Instead Aloysius ruffled his son's hair. "Well, then..."

The boy rolled his eyes, but bowed to each of the elder Snapes in turn. "Lucius Malfoy, sir. Lucius Malfoy, ma'am. Welcome to our home." Then he turned to Severus again. "I'm Lucius, and I'm glad you're here. What's your name?"

"I'm Severus." He didn't quite know what to think. His father would've beaten him bloody for talking back like that. Fortunately Lucius had done plenty of thinking for him.

"Want to go flying before dinner? I got a new broom for my birthday, so you can use my old one."

"Err..." Severus began, with a sideways glance at his parents.

"We don't want Severus to be any trouble," Livia said quickly.

Aloysius turned his grey eyes on her for a moment. "It will be no trouble, I assure you."

Tiberius pasted an indulgent smile on his face. "Severus, you may go flying with Master Lucius."

The boys didn't wait for permission to be revoked, and dashed off to the broom stable.

~*~

Severus woke up with a jolt as something heavy landed with a thump at his feet. A hasty Lumos revealed a large black cat sitting on the end of his bed, calmly regarding him with glowing green eyes. He settled back under the covers as the cat curled up and began purring. Being at *this* Malfoy Manor had obviously triggered memories.

He remembered his second visit to *that* Malfoy Manor all too well. Another formal dinner party, with several other children this time. They were all the same age as Lucius - older than he was. He'd met them, shyly mumbling his name and trying to match their names and faces. Vic Crabbe, Gary Goyle, Ewen Macnair, and others.

Vic and Ewen had grabbed him and dragged him down to the dungeons - a part of the manor he hadn't seen on his first visit. Vic had locked him in one of the cells while Ewen read him a litany of all his "sins", starting with him being "too young" to be worth anything.

"So we'll just leave you down here, little boy," he'd said. "No one will miss you. And even if they do, they'll never find you!"

He'd believed it. But just before he opened his mouth to plead for release, Lucius had showed up, absolutely furious. He'd shoved Ewen up against the wall with one arm across his throat.

"What're you doing? Let Sev out. Now!"

"Aw, Luce, we was just havin' some fun!" Vic turned the key in the lock as Lucius glared at him.

"Sev is my friend. You be nice to him!" It would've sounded funny coming from anyone else, but it seemed strangely fitting from Lucius.

And so it had gone. Lucius had become his protector. If the other boys didn't like him being there, they were wise enough to keep their opinions to themselves. When Lucius had gone off to Hogwarts, he'd made a point of writing to Severus three or four times during the year, telling him all about the school. Severus' father had been very pleased at this, and ordered him to do everything he could to stay friends once he started at Hogwarts.

Lucius had changed during his fourth year - Severus' second. He grew disdainful of Muggleborn wizards, and had begun to use the word "Mudblood" more and more frequently - though he was careful that the staff at Hogwarts never heard him. During the summer following, he'd often voiced the thought that Mudbloods were second-class citizens, and Muggles were quite simply good for nothing but slaves. Except that they weren't nearly as useful as house elves. Severus didn't quite understand the change in his formerly good-natured friend, but he'd gone along with it, especially when those sentiments were echoed by Vic and Gary and the rest of the Slytherins.

Lucius had always been interested in the Dark Arts, but during his fifth year this interest blossomed into something bordering on obsession. With the interest also came the beginnings of a cruel streak, and even his Housemates sometimes found themselves on the receiving end of various hexes and sharp words. They learned to walk lightly around him.

Severus dozed off again, despite the disturbing memories.

~*~

Flickering torches cast shadows over us. Gary waves his torch around to make the shadows dance. Rough flagstones rub underfoot as we make our way into the dungeons below the manor. Light dances off Lucius' shining blond hair. We stop in front of the same cell that Vic Crabbe locked me in seven -- no eight, years earlier. The door is closed.

I remember that night eight years ago all too well. It was one of the first times I'd been to Malfoy Manor, and I was the youngest one there. I didn't know anyone but Lucius. That made me fair game and easy prey. Lucius stopped them. He wouldn't let them hurt me. They said it was only a joke. Gorgeous, glorious Lucius. He always protects me.

He doesn't need to protect me from Vic and Gary and the others any more. We're all friends now. I've spent most of the summer here at Malfoy Manor, and gotten to know them. Vic and Gary want my help with Potions when school starts. Ewen wants help with Defense Against the Dark Arts. He can't cast a *Patronus* to save his neck.

White teeth flash as Lucius grins, yanking me back to the present. "You didn't think I'd forgotten about your birthday, did you?"

I raise one eyebrow in answer. "You've never forgotten." And he never has. Not in the eight years since we first met. It's hard for me to buy things for his birthday, but he says he understands.

"Hah! Good answer, Sev! Your present's in there." He gestures with the torch toward the closed door. "But first!" A long smooth hand darts into a pocket and pulls out a bottle. "A toast! To Severus! Happy Fourteenth!"

Passing the bottle around. Take a drink and hand it on. Swallow hard. Ignore the burning in throat and stomach. It's a fine brandy filched from the wine cellar. Lucius has impeccable taste.

It's easier the second time the bottle comes around. The brandy doesn't burn in my stomach any more. Even easier, the third. The burning has turned into a kind of glowing warmth. Everything looks brighter, but kind of distorted at the same time. When the bottle's empty, Lucius opens the cell.

It's a small room, this cell. It was empty except for a thick carpet of dust six years ago when I was its occupant, for that little while. It's been cleaned sometime recently, because the smell of cleanser lingers. And now there's a bed in it. A bed... with a girl... What? Oh! Oh no! What? She's my present, this girl. My present from Lucius.

She's a Muggle... a Mudblood. I have to do this. They expect it. Lucius wants me to. I can't disappoint him. He's protected me! I owe him!

She has brown hair and eyes. Huge wild eyes, like a fox caught in a trap. Long brown hair - it would fall halfway down her back if she was standing. But she's not. She's just lying there. She's not screaming either. Must be a spell... I can't do this... I can't. Turn around to look at them. They're grinning and laughing. They're my friends! They thought I would enjoy this! Merlin's teeth!

Grin back at them. Then turn back and go over to the bed. I don't think about what I'm doing. I just do it. The brandy makes it easier to not think about it. I finish and roll off her. Lucius flashes me a thumbs up as Vic moves past me. I grin at him like an idiot, ignoring what's going on behind me. Vic is a grunter, and someone else makes a rude comment about him.

I respond with a ruder one, and everyone laughs. It's like I passed some kind of test. Maybe I did.

~*~

Severus jerked upright, groping for his wand in the dark before he realized he'd been dreaming again. Or rather, having a nightmare. No, it was worse than a nightmare. He shivered despite the Warming charm on his blankets. He hadn't told anyone else about that night. He cast another Lumos spell, and rubbed his face.

"Oh dear Merlin." He'd tried, really tried, to forget about that night. "They'll hate me here if they find out about that. I can't tell them. I won't tell them!" The resolution made him feel a little better, and he was able to doze off shortly after, into a rest untroubled by dreams, soothed by the purring of the black cat at his feet.

Marauders, Mirrors, and Magic

Chapter 6 of 10

Fourteen year old Severus discovers that there's a very good reason why Time-turners are restricted.

Bright sunlight pouring into his room woke Severus up early the following morning. The cat had vanished sometime during the night as cats are wont to do. He dressed quickly, noticing that his clothing had been laundered overnight. He didn't bother with the school robes, but left them folded on the chair. As he combed his hair, a house elf appeared behind him.

"Is young master wanting his breakfast?"

Severus yelped and spun around, startled. "What? Oh, breakfast sounds good. Who are you?"

"Skiffy, I is, young master. Skiffy has been told to take care of the young master."

"You don't have to keep calling me that. My name is Severus."

The elf shook his or her head. "Skiffy is a good house elf. Skiffy does not call the masters by their names. If the young master will come with Skiffy, Skiffy will show him to the dining room."

Severus clattered after the house elf, urged on by the thought of food. "Skiffy, where's Professor Malfoy?"

"Master Malfoy is dressing, young master. He will be down for breakfast directly."

The dining room was where he remembered it from his childhood, but changed somewhat a large room with four windows. These were currently open, creating a pleasant cross-draft. The furniture was different. The walls were paneled in a lighter shade of wood. The carpet was just as lush, but a fine forest green instead of the deep blue of the room he remembered. The furniture was less massive; more graceful. The over-all effect projected warmth and welcome. Severus sat down at the table to wait for Professor Malfoy.

As if the thought had summoned him, Lucius entered the room a moment later, the black cat or one identical winding around his ankles imperiously. "Good morning, cousin Severus."

"Er, good morning sir."

"You can call me Lucius so long as we're not at Hogwarts, Severus." He sent an appraising look at the boy as he seated himself. "Did you sleep well?"

Severus started a little. "Tolerably. I've been here before... memories, you know. But it's not the same exactly. Like this room." He described the differences.

"Interesting. The manor has been in the family for at least five generations." He looked up as three elves appeared carrying enough food to feed a small army. "Let's eat. We've a lot to do today." He leaned down to set a plate on the floor for the cat. "There, Thunder. Now let me have my breakfast in peace."

Severus helped himself tentatively to scrambled eggs and bacon, and for a few minutes there was only the sound of silverware scraping across plates. Then he asked, "Sir Lucius did you know Professor Black when you were in school?"

"Unfortunately, yes. He was an arrogant little wart then and still is sometimes. In my seventh year, he was a constant thorn in my side. Always getting into trouble with those friends of his." He smiled tightly. "I gave them more than one detention."

"Potter, Lupin, and Pettigrew," Severus growled. "I'd love to hex their balls off!"

"Dumbledore was Headmaster then. Tom that is, Headmaster Riddle wouldn't have tolerated half their shenanigans." Lucius studied the boy for a moment. "Listen to me, Severus. Whatever they did to you in your past did not happen here. You must remember that."

"I remember what they did well enough." He subsided. "You're right. It's just hard they always get away with it." Only the oath he'd given Dumbledore stopped him from telling Lucius what had happened.

"They got away with far more than they should have, until they finally went too far." His face changed for a moment, revealing something glittering cold. "One of their pranks went wrong and got another student killed. That's what led to Dumbledore being removed as Headmaster and shuffled into a place where he can't hurt anyone." The coldness faded as quickly as it had appeared.

"What did they do?" Severus could hardly believe his ears. It sounded like his old nemeses had finally gotten their collective come-uppances. He wondered for half a moment if Lupin had killed the other him twenty-one years ago and then realized that Lucius would have likely remembered him if that were the case.

"It was during in their seventh year, so I wasn't directly involved. One of them and only they know who actually did the deed spiked the punch at the Hallowe'en Ball with a Love Potion. Unfortunately for them, another student was highly allergic to the potion and died as a result. They were expelled, and Dumbledore was held to be accountable. The school governors felt that had he clamped down on them much earlier, this never would've happened."

"So, if Black Professor Black was expelled, why is he teaching now? That doesn't make much sense."

"And that is exactly what I asked when Tom hired him, Severus. I'll answer you honestly, although it may be hard for you to understand. He did it to keep an eye on him. To make sure that history would not repeat itself. The others well, Potter and Pettigrew are married and seem to have outgrown most of their foolishness. Their own sons are here at Hogwarts both Gryffindors, of course."

"What about Lupin? What happened to him?" Severus was torn. On the one hand, he wanted to know where the werewolf was. On the other hand, as Lucius had pointed out, this Lupin wasn't the one that had nearly killed him. And he thought suddenly it was possible that Lupin wasn't a werewolf in this now.

"Gone. Vanished somewhere into the night. No one's seen him since the day he was expelled. The Ministry tried to track him down with no luck. All they ever found was his snapped wand. Most people think he's dead by now." Lucius shoveled another helping of bacon and eggs onto Severus' plate. "Enough of that unpleasant talk. You need to put on some weight."

The boy picked up his fork again. "What are we going to do today?" His parents would have been horrified at the idea of him asking for seconds at meals.

"After we eat, you are going to get measured for new clothes. After that we should have some free time. Is there anything you'd like to do?"

"Read." He caught the amused look Lucius gave him. "I really need to start learning how things are here maybe it'll help."

The amusement vanished. "You're quite right. We'll spend a couple of hours on that then. But I have no intention of keeping you at your books all summer. You need exercise as well. Do you play Quidditch?"

"I'm not very good at it. I like to fly, but Quidditch..." He shook his head.

"Quidditch is dominated by overgrown jocks." Lucius finished for him. "Let me introduce you to my sport of choice."

"What's that?"

"Skydancing."

~*~

The wizard who measured Severus for his new clothes was a short dark man introduced as Mr. Brown. He seemed cheerful enough, for he kept up a non-stop patter interspersed with instructions, while his enchanted tape measure roamed all over Severus, much as Ollivander's had done when he got his wand. "Hold your arms out thusly, young sir. Thank you. Now, as I was saying shocking what prices of schoolbooks are like these days. I have three at Hogwarts. Two Slytherins and a Ravenclaw. Thank you, you can put your arms down now. You're going to be in Slytherin? You'll meet Lilac and Lavender then. Jasmine is my Ravenclaw. Please put one foot up on this stool..."

Lucius caught Severus' eye and winked. He'd obviously heard this all before.

Mr. Brown captured his tape measure and returned it to his satchel. "All done with measurements. Now fabrics!" He waved his wand, and the air was filled with a veritable rainbow of pieces of cloth wafting around. "Color?"

Lucius shrugged. "It's your choice, cousin Severus. You have to wear them. I'd recommend choosing colors that complement each other."

"I like darker colors," Severus began. "Forest green... dark blue... grey... black. No reds or yellows."

"Good, good. Reds and yellows would not suit you at all. Let's see here." He waved his wand again, and his red and yellow samples disappeared, as did the lighter blues and greens. "Pick the ones you like, young man."

Severus hesitated. His parents had bitterly complained about the cost every time they'd had to buy new clothes for him. This was something he and Lucius had not discussed. He looked at the samples, wishing they were marked with prices. He picked out a deep green piece of heavy wool. "I like this one."

"Excuse us a moment, Mr. Brown." Lucius waved the tailor out into the hall. "What's the matter, Severus?"

Severus shook his head, staring at the floor. "This it's got to be costing you a fortune! I'll never be able to pay you back!"

"Tchah! Listen to me, my young friend," he tilted Severus' head up so their eyes met. "I am well able to afford this; I am a very, very wealthy man. I have no family to support."

"I can't accept it, sir. It's too much."

Lucius thought for a moment. The boy had his pride. "A bargain then we will call this a loan, which you agree to pay back as you can, when you can. While you are in school I will deduct one galleon from the amount owed for each point you earn for your House." He lifted an eyebrow. "Does this satisfy?"

Severus considered. "Accepted!" They shook hands, and Lucius called the tailor back in.

Three hours later, Mr. Brown had gone and Severus collapsed into a chair. "Merlin's teeth, Lucius! I didn't know there was so much to getting clothes!"

"If you want quality, you pay for it. Mr. Brown does excellent work."

"I've never had anything so fine before. Thank you again."

"It's my pleasure."

A relatively tall house-elf popped into the room. "Will Master Malfoy and the young master be wanting their luncheon?"

"Yes, Blitz. Coldcuts with bread and fruit." He caught Severus' eye and grinned. "I promised to show you Skydancing, and I can't do that after a heavy meal."

"So what is Skydancing?" he asked as they walked into the dining room. "I've never heard of it."

"In its simplest form," Lucius replied as he seated himself, "it's riding a broom while standing upright on it. It takes an excellent sense of balance."

Severus sat down. "I can imagine. I've done it a little bit, but only for short level flights."

"That's how you begin with it. Skydancers use different brooms. They're built more for stable and smooth flight, not for speed and maneuverability. Also," he began building himself a sandwich from the coldcuts the elves had brought, "the staves are thicker to provide slightly better traction and they don't have the Cushioning charms that riding brooms have."

"You said that was the simplest form. What other forms are there?"

"In one variant, there are two or three brooms spelled to fly in synch with each other. The skydancer jumps from broom to broom. The greater the dancer's skill, the farther apart the brooms are, and the faster they go. In another variation, there are multiple brooms at different heights, and the challenge is to switch between them. And in all of these, the dancers do stunts they balance on their hands or turn flips in mid-air, or whatever else they wish to try."

"That sounds amazing! Back where I come from, the only sport is Quidditch."

"You won't find skydancers at Hogwarts, cousin." Lucius gave him a grin. "But there is a professional troupe in London, and I will get tickets for their next performance. Finish your sandwich and we'll go outside and fly."

~*~

Severus brought his broom down into a smooth descent and landed gracefully. "That is fun!" He'd had no trouble staying balanced on straight level flights. Then Lucius had shown him how to change directions and how finally how to land. Severus was convinced that Lucius was an excellent teacher. He was sparing with his praise, but that made it all the sweeter. Now tired and a little muddy both had taken some falls they returned to the manor to clean up.

"Take a hot bath, cousin," Lucius said, as they came to his room. "As hot as you can stand it. Your muscles will thank you for it later."

Severus nodded. "What are we going to do till dinner?"

"I think it's time to start figuring out the differences between your time and now. I'll meet you in the library in an hour."

A number of parcels had appeared on his bed while they were outside. He picked one up at random, and looked at the neatly printed label: *Master Severus Snape, Third floor front suite, Malfoy Manor*. Hmm. He unwrapped it slowly, exposing two new shirts, one dark blue, one a deep grey. A card from Bourke & Brown Fine Apparel was tucked into the package also. Severus grinned and reached for another parcel. Now he wouldn't have to appear in the library in his muddy clothes. A few minutes later, he was soaking comfortably in hot water.

"I could get used to this," he said out loud.

"Get used to what, young man?"

Severus yelped and scrambled for his wand. "Wha? Who are you? Where are you?"

The voice chuckled. "I'm Romalg... I'm the mirror. You're the first person to occupy these rooms in a long time."

Severus turned around to look at the full-length mirror on the wall. "I've never met a mirror that could talk other than to tell me my hair wasn't combed."

Romalg chuckled again. "Young mirrors, then. The older a mirror is the more power it attains. My frame was carved in 1773, my glass was silvered in 1775."

"Have you always hung here?"

"As far back as I can remember, yes. This suite is traditionally for the eldest son of the house." The mirror paused for a moment. "You don't have much of the Malfoy look about you."

"I don't suppose I do." He climbed out of the tub and dried himself off. "Did Lucius have these rooms when he was younger?"

"Yes, indeed. As did Aloysius before him and Simeon before him, and so on."

"I know that portraits can talk to each other. Can mirrors?"

"Only if we're in the same room, or our frames were carved from the same wood. There are exactly seven mirrors in my family tree." Romalg chuckled at its pun.

Severus winced at the bad joke. "Where are your other... umm... siblings?" He reached for one of his new shirts and slid the soft linen over his shoulders.

"Two others are here at Malfoy Manor one in the master bath, one in the blue guest room on the first floor. One is at Hogwarts in the prefects' bath. One hangs behind the bar of the Leaky Cauldron. One is in the second floor ladies' lounge at the Ministry of Magic. The last is languishing in a junk shop in Diagon Alley, leaning up against a wall behind other unfortunates."

Severus began combing his hair. "What was Lucius like when he was younger?"

"Much like you are now, I think." Romalg replied. "Intelligent. Lonely much of the time. He did not have any real friends until after he left school."

"I don't make friends easily either." Severus looked up at the mirror. "I've enjoyed talking with you. I've got to go to the library now, but I'll be back later."

Outside his door, he paused getting his bearings, and then set off down the hall toward the stairs. "First floor main hallway, and it's either the second or third door on the left. I have got to get Lucius to show me around some more!"

He made it to the library and stopped dead in his tracks. The room was larger than he remembered, and it was filled with bookshelves, all loaded with books. Near the door were two large upholstered chairs with matching footstools, and between the two chairs was a low table with five or six books stacked on it. Lucius was comfortably ensconced in one of the chairs, leafing through a book, his black cat curled up next to him.

Severus slowly entered the room, feeling a little gobsmacked. Only the library at Hogwarts could compare to this. Lucius looked up and grinned. "Sit down, cousin. I've selected some books for us to start with."

He took the other chair and looked at the books on the table. "This one," he picked up *Marston's Genealogy of Wizards*, "looks like a good place to start. What have you got?"

Lucius held the book so he could read the title: *Hogwarts Alumni 1960-1980*. "I thought it might be interesting to see if there were any Snapes at Hogwarts around the time I was there. I don't recall any, but wanted to check on the years before and after. I'll work backwards from there."

They settled to their reading.

More Surprises

Chapter 7 of 10

Fourteen year old Severus discovers that there's a very good reason why Time-turners are restricted.

Chapter Six – More Surprises

The summer flew by quickly. Severus spent his days reading, skydancing, and getting used to the world he'd joined. Lucius had persuaded Headmaster Riddle to let Severus resit the OWLs that he'd missed, and he'd done well. Not surprisingly, his highest score was Potions, followed by Defense Against the Dark Arts. His Charms work, on the other hand, was barely passable. Lucius had simply raised an eyebrow and suggested he work on it. Severus was determined not to let his "cousin" down.

For Severus' fifteenth birthday, they'd gone to London to see the Windriders perform, and he'd been stunned by the caliber of the show. There was nothing sissyish about these skydancers; most of their stunts were done at high speed and fifty feet up. A fall would almost certainly result in serious injury. They flipped back and forth between brooms as if they were on level ground.

Four days before the fall term started, a large dappled horned owl swooped into the dining room while they were eating breakfast, and dropped a green envelope on Lucius' plate. He picked it up and glanced at the seal. "From Tom – Headmaster Riddle, that is." He tossed the owl a piece of bacon. It hooted gratefully and perched on the windowsill.

"What's the Headmaster want?" Severus looked up. "He's going to let me go to school isn't he?"

Lucius slit the envelope with a silver dagger and extracted the letter. "Whatever he wants, he wants an answer since Artemis is waiting." He read the note swiftly. "He wants to come over and see how you're doing before term starts. I'll invite him to come over this afternoon and stay to dinner."

"Cousin, how do you think I'm doing?"

"Quite well." He looked the young man up and down. "You've put on some weight and some muscle, and you did well on most of your OWLs. As for adjusting to this ... timeline... what's important is how comfortable you feel, not me. For what it's worth, though, I haven't heard you slip in the last month." Lucius scribbled a few lines on a sheet of his own letterhead, sealed it, and handed it to the owl who flapped off.

Severus thought about it. "I'm fine here, but school is going to be different."

"Yes – but knowing that it's going to be different is half the battle." Lucius mopped up the sausage gravy on his plate with a piece of toast. "What do you want to do today? If we leave the skydancing till this afternoon, the Headmaster may join us."

"The Headmaster skydances?"

Lucius grinned. "He tries, but he's a Quidditch player. You'll fly rings around him."

~*~

Well, it wasn't quite that easy, Severus decided later that afternoon. Tom Riddle was no slouch on a broomstick. He was fast and he was strong, but he lacked the regular practice that Severus and Lucius had been getting. After his fourth or so tumble, he laughingly called a halt.

"Maybe we should start offering skydancing as an alternative to Quidditch," he said as they headed back to the mansion, brooms over their shoulders. "Perhaps limit it to the fifth-years and up, due to the control it requires."

"Oh no you don't," Lucius replied. "I have enough to do with managing the Dueling club. I am not going to teach skydancing – even as an option."

"A pity, that." Tom smiled. "I haven't had a workout like this in far too long." He handed over his broom to one of the small army of house elves who descended on them. "As much as I'd like to talk brooms and such, we've got some more serious subjects to discuss. All three of us."

"The library then." Lucius replied, graciously leading the way. "It's comfortable and private."

Severus settled himself in his customary chair, though he didn't prop his feet up. Lucius sat next to him, and the Headmaster in a third chair brought in by one of the house elves.

"So," Tom said, when they were all seated, "what have you discovered?"

"We didn't find out exactly when things changed," Severus began. "But it looks like it was between sixty and eighty years ago. The furthest back we know things changed is about sixty-five years – my grandparents on my father's side never had children. They did meet, and they did marry... but my father was never born. So I don't exist here." That had actually been a relief; he'd been wondering what would happen if he met himself. "What we don't know is what exactly kept them from having children."

"The last major event in the wizarding world was Grindelwald's defeat in 1945." Lucius added. "That happened in both timelines. However, in this time, you helped defeat him..."

"But in my old time, Albus Dumbledore is credited with his defeat," concluded Severus.

Tom's eyebrows rose. "For all he's a fool at times, Dumbledore is a powerful wizard, that's true. He and I worked together with many others to defeat Grindelwald. Do you know if I existed in your timeline, Severus?"

"I'm not sure, sir. I mean, you were way before my time." He stared up at the ceiling for a moment. "Now that I think about it, I think I've seen your name somewhere around Hogwarts – maybe on a plaque or something. But I don't remember exactly where. So you probably existed, but..."

"The world of a grown man wouldn't intersect with that of a boy." Tom nodded. "That was purely a question for my vanity. It's actually good that you never existed in this time – Professor Flitwick thinks it would be extremely dangerous if you were to meet yourself."

"You had Filius looking at that time-turner, didn't you Tom? What did he find out?"

"Oh that was most interesting. Besides the original magic that made it what it was, there were four sets of intertangled spells applied to it."

Lucius' head came up sharply. "Four sets? As in..."

"Four different people casting spells on it at the same time, intertangling them. A singularly foolish thing to do."

"What kind of spells?" Severus asked. "And what are intertangled spells?"

"We can't tell precisely what kind of spells without using it again – and no one wants to volunteer to be a test subject." The Headmaster's voice was dry. "Intertangling occurs when more than one person casts a spell on a magical item at the same time. The innate magic of the item takes a few minutes to absorb each new spell. It has to unravel itself, absorb the new spell, and then knit itself back up again. In this case, there were seven or eight spells cast by four different people in a very short time. Each unraveled the original magic a little more, and interrupted the current healing process. Only the final spell could be identified: Inversus."

"Which might explain why I went forward in time instead of backwards." Severus mused aloud.

"I don't suppose the effect could be duplicated?" Lucius asked.

"Not likely. The four people who cast those spells were quite lucky that they stopped when they did. Time-turners are quite powerful artifacts, and they had almost unraveled the magic in it to the point where it would've been unable to reknit."

"What would've happened then?"

"The magic would be released in an explosion and anyone within the area would've probably been killed."

Severus let out a breath in a long whistle. "Let me guess – the more powerful the artifact, the bigger the explosion?"

"Exactly. So the upshot is," Tom looked directly at Severus, "we don't think we can send you back."

"Sir... sirs..." Severus looked back and forth between the Headmaster and his "cousin", "I wouldn't want to go back anyway. I'm happy here."

"Well then..." Lucius said into the silence, "let things continue as they are."

And so it was decided.

~*~

"Cousin Lucius, can I ask you something?" The Headmaster had departed, and they were back in the library as had become their custom in the evening.

"Certainly. I may not answer, but you can always ask."

"What do you think of Muggleborns?"

"That's an interesting question." Lucius replied, setting his book down to give Severus his complete attention. "Muggleborn wizards and witches bring new blood into the wizarding world – and that is both a good and a bad thing. It's a good thing because it provides challenge. It prevents us from stagnating. But they can be terribly pushy about forcing their ways and their customs on us. They are like rude guests; we can't throw them out, but we don't have to associate with them until they learn sense. Usually in two or three generations."

"So they're not inferior to wizards?"

"Not at all. They're just immature. They need to grow into our world. Remember – if you go back far enough in any wizard family, you'll find at least two Muggle ancestors. What brought this on?"

"There was a boy at my old school who thought they were inferior. He used to call them names." Severus decided it would not be polite to tell this Lucius it was that Lucius who had said such things.

"Some people do feel that way – rather strongly. But look at Tom Riddle! He's a half-blood, and he's one of the most powerful wizards alive today." He took in Severus' astonishment. "Oh yes. His father was a Muggle. His mother, though, was a pure descendant of Merlin."

"But all wizards are descended from Merlin – aren't they?"

"Yes, but some more closely than others. Didn't you go over this in History of Magic?"

"Not in a lot of detail. Professor Binns just said that Merlin had five sons and five daughters who became the ancestors of all wizards today."

"That's true as far as it goes. But when you look at the entire tree, you'll see what I mean." He picked up their much-thumbed copy of Marston's and unfolded a particular page. "Look here. Each of Merlin's children married a different person... a Muggle. Of their forty-seven children, eighteen married among themselves while the others married Muggles. The children of those eighteen married among themselves as did their children. Marriages were, and still are, arranged to keep the family lines intact. So, a pure descendant of Merlin is one whose only Muggle ancestors are the spouses of Merlin's original ten children."

"And it's these pure descendants who think that Muggleborns and half-bloods are inferior?"

"Some, yes." He thought for a moment. "But its families who have had unpleasant experiences with Muggles who are worse. They infect their children with disdain and contempt, and begin a legacy of misunderstandings. Often it takes generations before the rot works itself out. Sometimes it never does." Lucius looked up at the clock. "It's getting late. We need to go to Diagon Alley tomorrow and get your books and supplies for the year."

~*~

Severus got up early the following morning and dressed with extra care, prompting Romalg to tease him about going on a date. He laughed and threatened to hang the mirror in the back of his closet.

"You wouldn't dare!" Romalg sounded quite certain.

Still laughing, he seized the heavy frame and lifted the mirror from its brackets, turning it around to face the wall. "Should I make you stand in a corner instead?"

"MMRRPRPHSP!"

As Severus bent to lift the mirror again, his attention was caught by an inscription carved into the back. He grabbed a parchment and quill and copied it:

Eblli wuoys auoyw ohsl liwid na

Emot em anru oyka epsdn ahtro fdna ts.

He set the writing materials down and carefully rehung the mirror. "Did you know there's an inscription on the back of your frame?"

"Of course I did," Romalg huffed. "It's part of me after all."

Severus patted the mirror's black walnut frame in a gesture of apology. "What's it mean?"

"No idea. Try asking Lucius."

"I will." A thought struck him. "Romalg, we're going to Diagon Alley today. Is your sibling mirror still in the junk shop?"

"Buried in the back, stacked against the wall behind portraits and other mirrors."

"How would I know which one is the right one?"

"Turn it around and say my name. You'll know."

Severus nodded, patted the frame again, and went downstairs for breakfast after making sure his Hogwarts letter was safely tucked into a pocket. Lucius wasn't up yet, but Blitz and Skiffy were more than happy to bring him bacon and eggs and a pitcher of pumpkin juice. He spread out the copy of the inscription and studied it as he ate. Halfway through his second serving, Lucius came in.

"I don't see how you can rise so early," the older wizard grumbled as he took his seat and poured himself a generous mug of Darjeeling tea. "It's not natural."

"A benefit of youth?" Severus teased. Lucius was not a morning person and made no bones about it.

"Must be. Maybe I'll have Black create a Youth Elixir for me. On second thought, maybe not. He'd probably poison me." Lucius looked a little more awake as Blitz brought him a plate of hotcakes and syrup and more tea. "What's the parchment? Surely you aren't trying to memorize your book list!"

"I meant to ask you about it." He passed it across the table. "It's a copy of an inscription on the back of the mirror in my room." He explained about the teasing and how he'd turned the mirror around.

Lucius picked it up and studied it. "I never knew Romalg had an inscription! Not a normal language – maybe a code of some kind. I've no idea what it means. Perhaps we can look into it over the holidays." He finished the last of his hotcakes. "We've got a lot of shopping to do today. Shall we be off?"

They took the Floo network to The Leaky Cauldron, nodded to Tom, and went through the brick wall in back. Diagon Alley was larger than Severus remembered, with three other streets intersecting the main road, and many more shops. Fortunately, they were all well labeled. Indeed, some shopkeepers seemed to be having a contest to see who could have the largest sign. All the shops he remembered were there – Flourish & Blotts, Quality Quidditch Supplies, Madame Malkin's... Gringotts had relocated to the far end of the street; now shoppers had to pass virtually every store to get to the bank. A shrewd move, Severus thought. As they walked down the street, he noticed that what had been Eeylops Owl Emporium was now Eeylops Magical Menagerie – apparently the two stores had combined into one larger one in this here-and-now.

The people were much the same. Wizards and witches haggling over prices with shop owners or their assistants. Street-vendors hawking their wares. He smiled slightly and began to enjoy the excursion. Many witches and wizards nodded to Lucius and regarded Severus with outright curiosity. Several times, Lucius stopped and introduced his "cousin". Each introduction would be followed shortly by a quiet commentary.

"Evan Brown – the younger brother of our tailor. Slytherin, but only because he's too stupid for Ravenclaw, too cowardly for Gryffindor, and too lazy for Hufflepuff."

"Fenrir Greyback – one of the most dangerous men in the wizarding world today. Trust him not, if you value your life." There was cold condemnation in the older man's voice and Severus decided not to pursue the subject at that time.

"Aberon McGaven – retired Auror. He does spell research for the Ministry now. Some of his papers are absolutely fascinating; the man has a gift for making complex magic seem easy. If you've any inclination to become an Auror yourself, you should read them."

"Rita Skeeter – writes for the Daily Prophet and loves nothing more than scandal. Good ally and dangerous enemy. Best to stay on the good side of the press."

Lucius stopped for a moment outside Flourish & Blotts. "I saw the Potters go in here a moment ago. Remember, he's not the boy who made your life miserable – and neither is his son."

Severus nodded, determined not to embarrass Lucius. He squared his shoulders and entered the shop. It only took him a moment to spot James. The black messy hair and glasses were a giveaway. He was standing with one arm around his wife – a tall slender woman with reddish blonde hair, and the other around a boy about Severus' age. Severus snorted to himself as he looked at the boy. Same hair, same glasses. He hoped the boy wasn't in Slytherin and then remembered what Lucius had said.

The Potters were standing directly in front of the shelves that held the Transfiguration text for sixth year Hogwarts students. Severus walked over, intending to simply get the book and leave – and incidentally get a better look at his old nemesis.

"Excuse me," he said politely, "I need one of these."

"Are you new to Hogwarts this year?" the younger Potter asked. "I don't recognize you."

"Yes." The boy sounded friendly enough, but Severus was wary.

"Ah, Mr. Potter," Lucius smoothly cut in. "and the family. Allow me to introduce my cousin Severus. Severus, these are the Potters – James, Petunia, and Harry."

Petunia? Wasn't that the name of Lily's Muggle sister? Wonder what happened there! James and Lily were quite the item...He nodded at all three of them politely. But that was then, this is now. I will not embarrass Lucius by starting a fight. I'll ask him about it later.

James smiled and handed Severus one of the Transfiguration texts. "Sixth year?"

"So'm I," Harry said as Severus nodded. "I'm in Gryffindor."

"I'll be in Slytherin."

"I guess we'll see each other in classes then. Do you play Quidditch at all? Slytherin's desperate for new Beaters. Both left school last year."

Whatever reply Severus was going to make was lost as two other boys ran over and tackled Harry almost sending him into the bookshelves. One was tall for his age and lanky, with bright red hair and a generous helping of freckles. The other was short and stocky with thick blonde hair and a round face. They were introduced as Ron Weasley and Remus Pettigrew – Beater and Chaser for Gryffindor respectively.

"These're my best mates at school," Harry told Severus. "Ron and I co-captain the Quidditch team, but Remus here actually comes up with a lot of our strategies."

"Dad got us tickets to the Cannon's games over Winter break," Remus said, "front row seats, up high."

"And 'us' means Ron and Harry too," said a chunky blond man who'd waddled up.

Severus nearly jumped. That voice was far too familiar. He looked up at the face of Peter Pettigrew. He hadn't changed much in twenty-one years. Taller, of course, and his sandy-blond hair was thinning, but the fat round face was the same. Then he looked at the slender, blonde Mrs. Pettigrew and started again. *Merlin's teeth and toenails! Pettigrew married Narcissa Black?*

An Unexpected Encounter

Chapter 8 of 10

Fourteen year old Severus discovers that there's a very good reason why Time-turners are restricted.

Chapter Seven An Unexpected Encounter

In a sort of daze, Severus shook hands with the senior Pettigrews as Lucius introduced them. *I have got to ask cousin Lucius about this!* The other boys were talking Quidditch still, which was a good thing as he wasn't really paying attention to what they were saying. Then Remus looked up.

"Hey, there's the chipmunk!" His voice was too low for the adults to hear it.

"You mean the bushy-headed chipmunk!" Harry snickered.

"The stuck up, bushy-headed chipmunk!" That was Ron's contribution. "Watch out for her, she'll give you a detention!" All three Gryffindor boys burst into laughter, and Ron added, "She's worse than Percy!"

The object of these comments was a girl about their age who was flipping through a book on a nearby shelf. She had long brown hair that fell down her back in untamed curls, and Severus had to admit it did look something like a bush. He couldn't see her face from where he was standing, but guessed that she had prominent front teeth. "Who is that?" he jerked his head in her direction.

"That," Harry's voice dripped with contempt, "is Hermione Granger, one of the Prefects for Gryffindor this year."

"She's a fright!" Ron agreed. "I don't know why the Sorting Hat put her in Gryffindor. She should've been in Hufflepuff."

"She's going to be unbearable!" Remus chimed in. "She's always going on about us sneaking out after curfew or whatever. Now she'll be taking points and giving detentions! She doesn't care about the House Cup at all!"

Well, if my Housemates treated me like that, I wouldn't care about it either! I don't think Slytherins would ever act like that in public Severus made a show of looking up at the clock. "I'm afraid I have a lot of books to get yet," he said. "It was interesting meeting you all." *And that is the most accurate statement I think I've ever made in my life.* He wandered over to another section of the store seeking the rest of his books.

Half an hour later, they left Flourish & Blotts laden with books. In addition to Severus' schoolbooks, Lucius had bought a book on Wizarding Finance and Severus had chosen a biography of Andrew Pembroke, the captain of the Windriders. Once they were out of the store, Lucius shrunk the stack of books to the size and weight of a deck of cards and tucked them into his pocket. "That's better. Where to next, cousin?"

Severus was a little bemused. "I'd really like to learn that Charm. The only Shrink spell I know doesn't affect weight. Just size. I'd like to go into Eeylops, if you don't mind."

"I'll go over the Charm with you tonight, but I believe it's a standard part of sixth-year curriculum. While you're in the pet store, I'll step down to Bourke & Brown's and pick up your school robes. Let's plan to meet at the Apothecary in an hour."

Severus nodded and opened the door to the pet store. This version of Eeylops was much larger than the one he remembered. As he'd thought from the name, along with the ubiquitous owls, cats, and toads, they carried snakes, hawks, parrots, dogs, rats, and a few other animals that he didn't recognize. He cruised slowly up and down the aisles looking at everything. His first inclination was to get an owl or some other bird so he wouldn't be limited to school owls. But some of the other animals were interesting. In the cage in front of him were four half-grown dogs of some indeterminate breed. The cage next to them housed half a dozen black and tan Kneazle kittens. Further down was a pen of Nifflers. In the center of the store was a large cage containing a large white glistening sphere with highlights of green and gold. There was a sign next to it, and Severus read:

Coatl Egg

Imported under special permit from Mexico

Live Hatch Guaranteed*

Price upon request

*Guaranty void if proper care instructions are not followed explicitly.

There were quite a few people looking at the egg, including the two Slytherin boys he'd met in the infirmary. Severus nodded to them politely and strolled off down an aisle containing snakes of various kinds. The largest snake they had was a ten-foot reticulated python, but they also had a cobra, a puff adder, an American rattlesnake, and several others that he didn't recognize. In the very back of the store were several darkened cages containing a variety of bats.

Reluctantly, Severus decided to consult with Lucius after all, whatever Familiar he bought would be living in his cousin's house during the summers and would have to get along with Lucius' cat. He made his way out into the sunshine and considered. He had nearly half an hour before their planned meeting at the Apothecary. A thought struck him, and he went over to the junk shop on the seamier side of the street.

Baggins Backdoor Bargains was a small dirty shop filled with a huge variety of items that had seen better days. A couple of rusty swords were propped up in the window, supported by threadbare red velvet thrown over a stack of bricks. A sagging bookcase missing a shelf leaned against one wall. A few tattered books were the only contents. Wobbly tables loaded with other items filled the center of the one-room shop, and dust motes drifted thickly in the air making it hard to breathe. In the back of the shop, in

the corner, a stack of paintings and mirrors were leaned haphazardly against the wall. Severus flipped through them. The paintings were all junk bad copies of masterpieces. The painted figures moved jerkily, as if they were surrounded by a morass. Two of the mirrors were cracked, one so badly that pieces of the glass were missing. He lifted the third mirror and examined it. The frame was scarred and splintered around the edges, but basically intact. The glass was undamaged. The mirror itself was relatively small about a foot square. With his handkerchief, he wiped some of the dust from the glass.

"Romalg?"

"Nay, I am Aphros. How know ye of my tree-sib?" The voice was cracked and tired an old man's voice. Quite the contrast to Romalg's pleasant baritone.

"He's hanging in my bedroom," Severus whispered. "He told me about you. I'll talk with you tonight, but right now I have to get you out of here." He tucked the mirror under one arm and headed for the counter at the front of the dismal little store. A few minutes later, he was back out in the sunshine of Diagon Alley and on his way to the apothecary, the shrunken mirror safely tucked into a pocket

As he neared Quality Quidditch Supplies, he saw the three Gryffindor boys he met earlier standing outside obviously enraptured with the brooms on display there. They were talking animatedly, but broke off when Remus pointed at a girl just leaving the bookshop. He watched as they deliberately blocked her way, bumping into her just hard enough not to be an accident. Her arms were loaded with books, making her clumsy when she tried to avoid the trio. Severus was reminded of times in his past when a certain quartet of Gryffindors had done similar things to him.

He was close enough to hear the boys now, hear the hissed "chipmunk" and "stuck-up know-it-all". Hermione Granger again. Ron "accidentally" knocked her books out of her arms, and Severus got his first clear look at her face and stopped dead in his tracks.

Oh. Dear. Merlin. Her face wasn't quite the twin of the girl he had raped, but it was close. Too close. The memories came crashing down, and some of his self-disgust found its way onto his face just as she looked up and saw him. She bit her lip and ducked her head, quickly gathering up her scattered books. The other boys had gone. He hadn't seen them leave. Before he could organize his thoughts, she'd retrieved her belongings and fled down the street toward the Leaky Cauldron.

The shock of seeing her staggered him, and he nearly fell. Only a desperate grab at a convenient lamp post kept him on his feet. His stomach churned madly, and he felt bile rise in the back of his throat. *That's not the same girl! It can't be! It's been almost twenty-two years! I wasn't even here then! It didn't happen!* He swallowed hard. *I didn't do... that. I'm just feeling bad because Potter and his gang are bullying her. That's all it is.* His heart-rate slowed and his death-grip on the lamp post eased. *I didn't do ... what I did before. It didn't happen! I've got to get a grip on myself. Lucius will notice that something's wrong and I can't tell him.* His breathing began returning to normal. *Since it didn't happen, there's nothing to worry about. She's a Gryffindor. It's not like I have to live with her!* He took one last deep breath and straightened up before continuing on to the Apothecary.

Lucius wasn't there when he arrived, so he began picking out the supplies he would need, including scales, cauldron, gloves, and so on. He was pleasantly surprised to notice that the cauldrons of 1996 were just as solid as those of 1975, but considerably lighter. Another pleasant surprise was the Herb Garden in the back of the apothecary, where you could get absolutely fresh ingredients. He strolled down the rows of plants, nodding in approval and calming to something like his normal self. All common plants, but they comprised a large percentage of the ingredients for many useful potions particularly those used in medicine. On impulse, he added several packets of fresh herbs to his load and made his way back to the front of the shop just as Lucius swept in. Ten minutes later, his supplies were paid for, and they were on their way back to the Leaky Cauldron.

The Here and Now

Chapter 9 of 10

Fourteen year old Severus discovers that there's a very good reason why Time-turners are restricted.

Chapter Eight The Here and Now

The time spent in the Apothecary allowed Severus to regain his balance, and if he was a little quieter than normal for much of the afternoon, Lucius put it down to the encounter with the Potters and Pettigrews.

"There's an excellent restaurant three blocks away," the older wizard suggested when their shopping was done. "Do you like Moroccan food?"

"I've never had it," Severus answered, but added quickly, "I'd like to try it."

"This way, then." He led them down the street and finally stopped in front of a large grey stone building with a plain green door. A small hand-printed card on the door proclaimed it to be The Marrakesh. Lucius knocked on the door once and waited. A moment later, the door opened to admit them.

They found themselves in a large anteroom, filled with wizards and witches standing about and chatting amiably with each other. The patrons of this establishment were all well-dressed, and Severus was glad once again for his new clothes. There was no Floo here, although there was an ornamental fireplace on one wall. The floors were highly polished black marble. He looked around and saw a familiar face. "The Headmaster's here, cousin."

Lucius turned. "So he is." They edged through the crowd toward the tall wizard. As they got closer, it became apparent that he wasn't alone. He had an older couple with him. Seeing Lucius and Severus, he beckoned to them.

"I'd like to introduce you to my parents," he said, indicating the older couple. "Mother, Father, this is Lucius Malfoy, one of my staff. This is his cousin Severus." He paused a moment. "Lucius, Severus, my father, Tom, and my mother, Merope."

Tom Riddle, Sr., was a full head taller than his son, with a fringe of silver hair that matched the frames of the bifocals perched on his nose. A big man, broad-shouldered, with powerful square hands. A man who was no stranger to hard work. Severus was mildly startled to notice that he was wearing a Muggle suit. Mrs. Riddle, on the other hand, was a small slender woman with a pale thin face framed by long black hair, now shot through with grey. Her hand trembled slightly as she held it out to them in greeting. When Severus took it as gently as he could, he saw there was very little flesh on it.

"This is Merope's favorite place," Mr. Riddle said. "We try to come here once or twice a month." He put his arm around his wife and squeezed gently.

"Tommy doesn't get to join us very often," Merope put in, ignoring the flush that mounted on her son's face at the diminutive. "He's so busy at school."

"I have dinner with you when I can, Mother," the Headmaster replied. "Now let's find you a place to sit; it will be some time yet before our table is ready."

"Join us, Professor?" Mr. Riddle asked as his son settled his wife in one of the corner chairs. "I always like hearing about the school." He grinned. "I'm a Muggle, as you probably guessed."

"We wouldn't want to intrude on a family outing," Lucius demurred.

"You won't be intruding. Half the reason we come here is to meet new people. Come now, I insist!" He led the way to the alcove where his wife and son were. "Lucius and Severus are going to join us for dinner," he announced.

Their table was announced nearly fifteen minutes later, and they were led into the restaurant. It was divided into several rooms, each with a large, very low, round table. Thick mats and pillows surrounded the tables, providing comfortable seats and backrests for the patrons. "It's crowded today," Lucius observed. "We'll probably have company."

"The more, the merrier," Merope said.

"Company?" Severus asked, sitting down on one of the mats and adjusting a pillow.

"There's room at each table for six or eight people," Lucius explained. "Since there's only five of us, it's likely they'll put someone else here. It's quite an excellent way to meet people, as Mr. Riddle said."

Indeed, a moment later, another man was ushered into the room. Severus felt the tension-level go up as the man sat down next to him. He looked vaguely familiar, but only when Lucius greeted him with a civil, "Good evening, Greyback" did he remember seeing him earlier that day in Diagon Alley, and what Lucius had said about him.

"Evening, Malfoy, Riddle," he looked over at Severus. "Saw you earlier today, don't remember your name. Fenrir Greyback." As he held out his long-fingered hand, his shirt-sleeve fell back exposing a heavy iron bracelet on his wrist. There were letters engraved on it, but the only ones Severus could see clearly were Z-K-A-B.

"What do you do, Mr. Greyback?" Mr. Riddle asked after introductions were complete.

"I work for the Ministry. Nothing too exciting. I take care of the Owlrey there. What about you, sir?"

"I'm retired. I used to run a small business near Little Hangleton." He began talking about it something to do with building houses. Severus quit listening, wondering what could possibly be so dangerous about a man who took care of an Owlrey. He decided to ask Lucius later.

~*~

The early dinner at Diagon Alley meant more time in the library at Malfoy Manor that evening. As far as Severus was concerned, this was a good thing. There were a number of things he wanted to ask about.

"Cousin Lucius, tell me about Hogwarts the students, I mean. Especially the Slytherins."

"Well as you probably know, there are usually seven to ten students in each year for each House," Lucius replied, "for two-hundred and some total. Your current fellow sixth-years in Slytherin are the Misses Bulstrode, Davis, Parkinson, and Brown along with Messrs. Crabbe, Goyle, and Nott." He lifted an elegant eyebrow. "As I am Head of Slytherin House, I cannot tell you everything about them, but I can at least give you some grounding."

Severus nodded. "I don't want to play up being your cousin. They'd never... be real friends."

"Wise, cousin Severus. Very wise. Well then. Of the lot, your closest academic rival is Miss Davis. Miss Bulstrode is temperamental and prone to physical violence if provoked. Miss Parkinson is fixated upon Mr. Nott, to the detriment of her studies. If she does not improve, she may find herself repeating a year." Lucius paused a moment. "Miss Brown is the protégée of Professor Trelawney. Remember what she says, but do not obsess on it."

"Who is Professor Trelawney?"

"Sybil? She teaches Divination." He made a wry face. "Flitwick considers her to be a charlatan, but I am not so sure. When she cares to wager on the results of Quidditch matches, she wins with great regularity."

"I've never met a real Seer," Severus said. "At my old school, the Divination teacher was a fraud. We used to sleep through her class. But you were telling me about the Slytherins."

"So I was. Mr. Crabbe and Mr. Goyle are like two sides of the same coin. You rarely see one without the other. Mr. Nott is ... nondescript. Average in looks. Average in intelligence. Average in classes. Rarely gets into trouble, but when he does..." His eyes brightened with memory. "Last year, he spelled the ashtrays that the Ravensclaws were going to be Transfiguring into hedgehogs with a mirror shield. When they tried to do their assignment, the spells bounced back at them. Minerva was fit to be tied! Filius that is, Professor Flitwick - was none too pleased either."

"I met Crabbe and Goyle in the Infirmary at the end of last term, and I saw them in the pet store today," Severus said. "There's a coatl egg there. I've read about them, but never seen one."

"Not surprising they're not terribly hardy creatures. A British winter will likely kill the poor beast."

Severus drummed his fingers on the arm of his chair for a moment before asking his next question. "Cousin do you know a Lily Evans?"

Lucius raised his head sharply. "I knew her. She was two years behind me at school. She's dead now."

"What happened?"

"She was the student I told you about who died as a result of a prank gone bad." Lucius said quietly. He studied his hands for a long moment. "She and I had something of an understanding, which infuriated Potter James Potter, that is and his gang. I still wonder sometimes if that prank was intended to get at me through her."

"A love potion make her fall in love with one of them? It sounds like something they'd do."

"It wasn't the only time they meddled in my affairs. After Lily died, my parents attempted to arrange a 'proper' marriage for me not my idea, I assure you. I found myself betrothed to Narcissa Black." He chuckled a little ruefully. "She only agreed to it for my money and the Malfoy name. Sirius Black convinced her to renege. So here I sit, unwed, with no heir much to the despair of my ancestors." He nodded toward the stairwell, which was lined with portraits of other Malfoys.

"What is Professor Black like as a teacher? What do the Slytherins say?"

"He's harsh on Slytherins, and annoyingly biased toward young Potter. I suppose it's only to be expected he's his godfather, after all. I know that he will not take points from his godson or his friends unless the Headmaster makes him. So if young Potter and his friends give you trouble, come to me as your Head of House, and I will deal with it. You'll have no joy taking them on yourself."

"I sort of gathered that Potter and those two friends of his are bullies."

"Oh? Who was their target? It can't have been Crabbe or Goyle that would not have been a silent confrontation."

"It wasn't a Slytherin. It was another Gryffindor."

Lucius raised an eyebrow. "So, there is trouble within the Lions' Den. Well, that is Black's problem, not ours."

"Why does the Headmaster let them get away with acting like that?"

"Their behavior at Hogwarts is more moderate. The Headmaster has no authority over them when they're out of school."

"I suppose that makes sense." Severus thought about their dinner companion. "Why is Mr. Greyback so dangerous? And what was that bracelet he wears?"

Lucius leaned back in his chair and regarded the younger wizard for a long moment. "Fenrir Greyback is a werewolf. He is under a geas that compels him to go to a cell under the Ministry every month where he can transform and not hurt anyone else. That bracelet is the focus of the Geas. If it were removed, he would be free. And no geas is fool-proof."

"A werewolf? Why didn't they just kill him?"

"It's complex. He's a Squib, not a wizard, so the Ministry believes he's safe enough in human form. They also believe that he's not completely responsible for what he did while shape-changed. And killing him wouldn't bring back the people he killed before he was caught. He didn't escape punishment. Everything he had was taken and given to the families of his victims. He spent six months in Azkaban, and then was released under the Geas. While he can be civil you saw that tonight he harbors a great resentment. That simmering anger will consume him one day, and no one will be safe when that happens."

"Resentment? What's he got to be resentful over?"

"Have you never considered what life must be like for a Squib? What must it be like to be surrounded by magic and have none of your own?"

Severus digested this unpalatable question. "Mr. Riddle seems happy here," he said finally. "He doesn't have any magic."

"The Riddles live mostly in the Muggle world. For him, a trip to Diagon Alley is much like being on holiday." Lucius changed the subject. "What are you reading tonight?"

"I want to finish the last chapter of *Hogwarts: A History* before the term starts. It's really interesting to see what things are like here and now. What are you reading?"

"*The Definitive Kipling*." Lucius smiled at the younger wizard's startled glance. "Kipling was a genius with the written word in his own way, particularly in verse."

"I haven't ever read any of his poetry," Severus said. "He was a Muggle, wasn't he?"

"A Squib, actually. He lived mostly in the Muggle world, particularly as an adult. In his private writings, he said he found it more comfortable." Lucius opened his book. "Listen, my young friend." He found the page he was looking for and began reading aloud in a solemn voice.

"One Man in a Thousand, Solomon says,

Will stick more close than a brother...

But the Thousandth Man will stand by your side

To the Gallows' Foot and after!"

Severus listened carefully. "Are there such people?" He asked. "Does a Thousandth Man really exist?"

"I believe that James Potter and Sirius Black are each others' Thousandth Man. They were fortunate enough to find each other early in life."

"But they..." Severus thought a minute. "You're saying it's a personal thing like the saying about one man's meat is another man's poison."

"Exactly. And before you ask, I have not found a Thousandth Man yet, though I hope to."

Severus looked around the library. "Are there any other poets who write like that? About real things."

"Hmm. What do you think of this:" He closed the Kipling book and recited softly.

"Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,

And sorry I could not travel both

And be one traveler, long I stood

And looked down one as far as I could

To where it bent in the undergrowth...

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I,

I took the one less traveled by.

And that has made all the difference."

"Making choices..." Severus mused. "Recognizing the choice in the first place, and having the will to take the unpopular side."

"Very good! That is Robert Frost, if you're wondering. An American poet, and a Muggle." He pointed a long finger towards one of the bookshelves. "Third shelf from the bottom, near the left side."

The boy went over and found the book. "He's fairly prolific."

"Yes he is. You could do worse than read Frost, Kipling, or any of a dozen other authors. I'll recommend some others if you like."

Severus returned to his chair with the book. "I'd like that." He set it down carefully and picked up *Hogwarts: A History*. "But I still want to finish this as well."

"You can take the Frost book to school with you if you like. Just make sure that your recreational reading doesn't interfere with your studies."

He nodded. "I'll be careful."

~*~

Severus spent the following day packing and repacking his trunk. Every time he thought he was finished, he'd think of something else that he wanted to take along. He was

aided in his endeavors by Skiffy who tsked at him when he wrinkled his new robes. The house elf whisked them away and returned them shortly restored to their pristine condition.

"I wish I was better at Charms," he muttered, as he emptied the trunk for a fifth attempt at packing. "Then I'd shrink everything to make it fit."

"Not good idea, Master Severus. Skiffy knows. Charm wear off boom! Trunk explode. Bad, bad."

"Look at all this! How'm I supposed to get it to fit?"

Skiffy winked one green eye at him. "Skiffy pack for Master Severus?"

"Errm." Severus hated to take advantage of the elves. "Why don't you show me how to pack?"

"Master Severus is wise! Skiffy will show." The elf proceeded to tuck everything into the trunk with room to spare. "Big things first. Like cauldron. Put things in cauldron also. Shoes. Then smaller things. Then even smaller things. Lay clothes flat on top. Easy, Master Severus."

"You're a life-saver, Skiffy." Severus regarded the now-packed trunk. "I can even take a couple extra books if I want."

The elf nodded. "Take out clothes first." He wagged a finger. "Books under clothes, not on."

Severus closed the trunk and locked it. "Right. Clothes on top of everything else." He headed downstairs for dinner.

~*~

The following morning, Lucius Apparated them to King's Cross station. They crossed onto Platform 6 7/8, Severus pushing a trolley holding his trunk. There were a few other students there already; Severus recognized the Potters and Pettigrews. He gritted his teeth and reminded himself again that things were different here and now.

"I will be Apparating to Hogwarts," Lucius said, "and I'll see you at dinner." They shook hands, and he disappeared with a rush of displaced air.

Severus shoved his trolley toward the Hogwarts Express and hefted his trunk onto the train. He took a quiet pride in his strength; skydancing all summer had been good for him. It was a simple matter to find a quiet compartment, and he took out a book and began reading.

"Excuse me," A diffident tap on the door. He looked up, startled. A young man about his own age stood there. "Mind if I sit here?"

"Sure." Severus studied him for a moment, not saying anything. He was long and thin, with light brown hair that grew forward and flopped over his face.

"Derek Bourke. You're new this year?"

"Yes." He'd expected some minor interrogation, and was ready for it. "'Severus Snape. I'm in sixth year." They shook hands.

Derek sat down across from him, curiosity written on his face. "I'm in Slytherin seventh year. Any idea what House you'll be in?"

"Slytherin also."

"Wicked! I saw some of the other Slytherins in the car. Want me to introduce you?"

"That'd be nice." Severus returned his book to his trunk and followed Derek down the corridor.

All the compartments were full or nearly so of students talking and laughing together. Severus desperately wanted to be accepted, to become part of this. To belong. Derek stopped in front of one that had the door propped open. There were three other boys inside.

"Chris, Marlowe, Isaac this is Severus. He's a new sixth year. Severus, these're some of the other seventh years. The girls are where?"

A red haired boy stuck out a hand. "Chris Warrington, Severus. Derek, the girls are in the next car up Lavender brought a new catalogue from B&Bs, and they're all oohing and ahing over clothes."

"Marlowe Wilkes. Good to meet you." Wilkes was short and dark. Severus shook hands.

"Isaac Scott." This young man was lanky and blond, with a burr to rival Professor McGonagall. His hand was cool and dry. "I think the sixth years are two compartments up, on the left. Oh, and watch out for the Weasley twins they've been busy over the summer."

"Weasley? I met a Weasley at the bookstore," Severus offered.

"There's a lot of them," Chris replied. "Fred and George aren't bad; they can be funny. Percy was a little prig in school, and hasn't changed much from what my father says they both work at the Ministry now. I don't know the two younger ones though."

"Ron and Ginny," supplied Derek. "Ron's in your year, Severus. You don't want to run afoul of him and his friends."

"Yeah," Isaac added. "His Head of House always takes his side."

"Professor Black," Marlowe spat. "I hate that man!"

"Come on, Sev let's find your classmates." Once out in the corridor, Derek continued, "Once Wilkes gets started on how much he hates Black, he'll be ranting all the way to school." He pointed with an elbow to another compartment where two red-haired boys were talking and gesturing enthusiastically at each other. "Those're the Weasley twins. They like to play jokes, but they don't get mean about it. They're Gryffindors, so we mostly leave them alone and they leave us alone. They're actually eighteen, but had to repeat a year don't let on that I told you. Ah, here we go." He opened another compartment that held three other boys and a girl. "Severus, these are Ted, Vince, and Greg. And Pansy. This is Severus he's a new sixth year."

The boy introduced as Ted stood up and held out a callused hand, "I'm Ted Nott, the sixth year Prefect for Slytherin. Good to meet you. Join us?"

"Sure." Severus took a seat near the door. "Thank you."

"I'll leave you here then, Sev." Derek said "See you at dinner." He vanished back the way they'd came.

Pansy looked him up and down, making him glad for his new clothes. "Where are you from?" Her hand trailed over Nott's arm carelessly as she spoke.

"Devonshire. I've been home-schooled." Pansy was pretty enough, he thought, with her blonde hair and bright blue eyes. But there was something about the set of her eyes that he didn't quite trust.

"My parents wanted to home-school me," Greg said. "But they decided to send me to Hogwarts instead."

"You? Home-schooled?" Pansy laughed derisively, only to cut off in pain as Vince caught one of her arms and twisted. "Ow! Lemme go!"

"You know the rules, Pansy," Ted said. "Say what you like on holiday, but not here."

Severus made a mental note as Pansy glared, but stammered out an apology. Vince let her go, and she sat down rubbing her arm.

"We don't fight among ourselves at school," Ted fixed Severus with his stone-grey eyes. "We work together to achieve our ambitions, and not just in class."

"You'll learn more tonight," said Greg. "We always talk about what we want to do and how to do it on the first night of each term."

"Our Head of House will be there also, and he always has suggestions." That was Vince.

"Professor Malfoy," Ted explained. "He teaches Defense Against the Dark Arts."

"He's a good teacher," Pansy contributed, forgetting her ill temper. "He'll explain how and why spells work."

"If you're good at Defense, we can use you in the dueling club," Greg waved a hand expressively. "Ravenclaw beat us last year, and I'd love to pay them back."

"The boggart wasn't fair," Ted agreed. "But Greg, you need to learn to cast a Patronus. I wish I was better at explaining them."

"It's not just happy memories," Severus said. "It's got to be... a really special memory."*And my special memory has changed. It used to be when that Lucius made them let me out of that cell. Now it's this Lucius inviting me to come stay with him at Malfoy Manor.*

"Sev's right," Pansy said. "Like a first kiss that's a good one." Her eyes got dreamy, and Nott blushed.

"I don't have any memories like that," Greg complained.

"What about the time you beat Weasley in that duel?" Vince asked. "That was great you took him out in two spells!"

"Or last year, when you nearly knocked Potter off his broom with that Bludger?" Ted said. "Gave us the game, you did!"

"That's right, I did." Greg brightened.

"So remember it," Severus instructed. "Relive it until you know every little detail. Close your eyes and remember hitting the Bludger... follow it through the air as it whistles toward Potter. See him try to dodge, and grab desperately for his broom. Remember the look on his face..." He trailed off as the other Slytherins stared at him.

"Damn, Sev, is that all there is to it?"

He flushed. "Pretty much. You have to live and relive the memory until it becomes part of you."

"Well," Nott said into the silence, "If you're willing, I'd like you to tutor some of us in Defense this term."

"Sure!" But I'm not going to ask for help with Charms. Not yet. They'd laugh at me. Charms is supposed to be an easy class!

Severus relaxed slightly in his seat and let the conversation flow around him, contributing where he could. Names flew by his ears, and he made mental notes. Lilac Brown of Slytherin and Robert Sharples of Ravenclaw Head Girl and Head Boy respectively. Neville Longbottom of Hufflepuff don't sit next to him in Transfiguration if you can avoid it. The Prefects for each of the Houses Ted Nott, Hermione Granger, Terry Boot for Ravenclaw, and Susan Bones for Hufflepuff. James Moon of Ravenclaw a walking disaster in Potions. The Sloper twins the reserve Chasers for Slytherin this year. Many names and descriptions. As the train pulled to a stop at Hogsmeade, he wondered if this would work out. How would he keep himself from confusing his past with his present?

Hogwarts

Chapter 10 of 10

Fourteen year old Severus discovers that there's a very good reason why Time-turners are restricted.

When the Hogwarts Express finally pulled into the Hogsmeade station, Severus was feeling somewhat more comfortable with his situation. His fellow sixth years were an odd bunch, especially when compared to his classmates from before. These Slytherins were friendlier... lighter somehow. It finally dawned on him that he hadn't heard the word "Mudblood" once that day. It was "Muggle" or "Muggleborn".

Too, there wasn't the fanatical rivalry with the Gryffindors that had marked his earlier years. There were some personal feuds, mostly he noticed dealing with Harry Potter and his friends. Here, Slytherin's biggest rival over-all was Ravenclaw. Gryffindor had spent the last few years solidly trailing Hufflepuff in House Points. Even Potter's vaunted Quidditch prowess couldn't make up for their foolhardiness.

Watching his classmates covertly, he came to another epiphany. There was honest friendship here. Not the "I'll be your friend as long there's something in it for me" type of friendship that he was familiar with, but the "I'll be your friend because I like you" sort. Close on the heels of that realization came two thoughts in swift succession that one found a Thousandth Man via friendship, and that he had never had anyone his own age that he could call a friend. He wanted desperately to change this.

He climbed down off the train and trailed along after the other sixth-years to where the dozens of carriages waited, looking for one that was unoccupied.

"Severus!"

He turned to see Ted Nott waving at him from a carriage, and took a few steps in that direction. "Eh?"

"Sit with us. There's room."

For some reason, this simple invitation cheered him immeasurably, and he trotted over to the carriage and found himself with Ted, Pansy, and another girl introduced as Tracey Davis, the Seeker for Slytherin's Quidditch team.

"We're going to win the House Cup this year," Ted said.

"Only if we come up with some decent Beaters," said the Seeker. "I'm hoping to coax Vince and Greg into trying out. They've got the muscle certainly."

"We've also got to work on dueling," Pansy reminded them. "Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff are not going to be pushovers."

"Hufflepuff?" Severus asked, in spite of himself.

Ted grinned at him. "Sounds silly, doesn't it? But that lot is implacable on defense. They know some of the best shielding spells I've ever seen. They let you wear yourself out attacking them, and then... wham!"

Tracey nodded. "Gryffindor's our closest rival in Quidditch though. Potter is a little wart, but he's a damn good Seeker. Found out that he's been trying to get the Headmaster to overturn the rule about school brooms."

"Oh no, he'd better not," Ted said. "The rule is," he explained to Severus, "that brooms are provided by the school. That way the games are won by skill and talent, and not just who has the most money."

"I heard," Pansy interjected, "that his father bought him one of those Nimbus Stormkings for his birthday."

"A Stormking? That's the broom the Winbourne Wasps use!" Tracey let out a long whistle. "We'd never be able to out-fly him with that."

"I'll be surprised if the Headmaster changes his mind," Ted said. "He's the one who made the rule in the first place."

Pansy snorted. "I'm glad he's a Slytherin. Can you imagine what school would be like if a Gryffindor was in charge?"

Ted's reply was lost as the carriage came to a halt. They disembarked and filed into the Great Hall, and sat down at the long tables. Severus looked around, somewhat pleased to find that it was much the same as what he remembered. Four long tables for the students, and the High Table at the end for the faculty and staff. He recognized many of them. Lucius was there, sitting near one end of the table, with Professor McGonagall on his left, and Professor Flitwick on his right. The Headmaster was there also, talking with Hagrid and Professor Sprout. Professor Black sat at the other end of the table talking to Professor Sinistra. There were a few unfamiliar faces though, and he hoped he wouldn't have any awkward encounters because of it.

The great doors swung open, and a stream of children entered, shepherded by Mr. Filch and Madame Hooch. As they filed to the front of the room, a man Severus didn't know stepped forward with the Sorting Hat and placed it on a tall stool. As he stepped back, the rip along the brim opened, and the hat began singing its traditional Sorting Song in a rough and crackly voice.

When the hat finished singing, the man stepped forward again with a long scroll of parchment. "When I call your name," he said to the new students, "you will come forward and sit on this stool. I will place the Sorting Hat on your head, and it will put you in your proper House." He paused for a moment. "Blair, Devon"

Blair was a tall, skinny, brown-haired boy whose robes were somewhat too short for him. He climbed up onto the platform awkwardly, and sat down on the stool. As the Sorting Hat was placed on the boy's head, Severus caught Greg's eye.

"Who's that doing the Sorting?" he asked out of the corner of his mouth. He heard the Hat shout "Gryffindor!" in the background.

"That's Professor Carpe," Greg replied just as quietly, "Ancient Runes. I'm not going to take it if I can help it. It's an elective."

"And who's the witch with the funny glasses sitting next to Professor Flitwick," Severus asked as the now-identified Professor Carpe called the next name.

"Professor Trelawney. She teaches Divination."

"Quiet!" Ted hissed at them, "I'll tell you who everyone is over dinner. Pay attention to the Sorting." He began applauding, and Severus realized belatedly that the first new Slytherin, a slender black-haired girl, was heading their way somewhat nervously. A stocky boy sitting a few seats down jumped to his feet as she approached. "Congratulations, Sis!"

By the time the Sorting was over, there were eight new students at each table. Gryffindor and Slytherin had four boys and four girls, but Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff's new students each consisted of five boys and three girls. As soon as the last of the new students, Slytherin Granville Wilkes, Marlowe's youngest brother, had taken his seat, the Headmaster rose to address the school.

"Welcome to Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry! I'm sure you're all quite ready to have your dinners, but I've a few words to say beforehand. For you first-year students, allow me to introduce your heads of House. Professor Sirius Black, our Potions instructor, is Head of House Gryffindor."

The Gryffindors cheered wildly as Black got to his feet and bowed, subsiding only after the Headmaster waved for silence.

"Professor Sprout who teaches Herbology is the Head of House Hufflepuff." Sprout bobbed her head and smiled, and again the cheers rang out, this time from the Hufflepuff table.

"Our Charms Master, Professor Flitwick, is the Head of House Ravenclaw." The Ravenclaw cheers somehow sounded sedate as their Head of House took a bow, even though they were fully as enthusiastic.

"Lastly, the Head of House Slytherin is our Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher, Professor Lucius Malfoy." Severus and the other Slytherins applauded and cheered as Lucius rose and bowed gracefully.

"While you are here," Headmaster Riddle continued, "your House will become your family. You will be expected to work together." He pointed to the four great hourglasses on the wall. "Those contain the points for each House. Your triumphs will earn you points, and your failures will cost you those same points. At the end of the year, the House with the most points will be awarded the House Cup for the year. You newcomers should be aware that the Forbidden Forest is strictly off limits; some of you returning students should remember that also." His voice turned hard on the last sentence and his glance fell on the Weasley twins.

He swept his gaze over the four tables and his voice lightened slightly. "Madame Hooch informs me that Quidditch tryouts will be held the week after next. See your Head of House for more information. First years may try out for house teams, but will only be allowed to play as reserves. There has been some recent controversy over the Hogwarts policy of requiring that games be played on school-provided brooms. This policy will not be rescinded."

There was a growling from the Gryffindor table, quashed instantly when the Headmaster glanced that direction.

"The Dueling Club will hold its first meeting on Saturday," he continued. "Please see Professor Malfoy if you wish to participate. Seventh year students, please note that your independent research projects must be approved by the end of the month. Third year students on up, turn in your Hogsmeade permission slips to your Head of House. If you do not have a signed permission slip, you will not be permitted to leave the school grounds."

Again the Headmaster's eyes flickered over each table. "Your Head of House will hand out your class schedules this evening. For right now, however, we shall feast!" On the final word, platters laden with food appeared on the tables in front of the hungry students.

I hope Lucius will sign a Hogsmeade form for me, Severus thought as he piled roast beef on his plate.*He's supposed to be my legal guardian.*

Once the initial clatter of serving-ware was done, Ted turned to Severus. "Let me identify all the teachers for you." He nodded down toward the end of the table. "The second-years are already doing that for our new members. Let's see. Starting from the left..." He quickly named each professor along with what subject he or she taught.

"Do you know what classes you'll be taking?"

"Charms, Potions, Defense, and Transfiguration," Severus began. "And Herbology of course. I'd like to take Arithmancy, Astronomy, and Ancient Runes as well."

"Can't say as I blame you. "I'm taking Arithmancy, Ancient Runes, and Care of Magical Creatures. And we'll have the chance to learn to Apparate this year as well!"

"Learning to Apparate will be fun," Severus agreed. "I've heard it really tests your ability to concentrate."

"I'm going to be taking double Divination," Lavender Brown contributed. "And Astronomy. I've no head for Arithmancy."

"Double Divination?" Greg asked. "I thought we weren't allowed to double up until next year."

"If your teacher agrees, you can," Lavender replied, polishing her fingernails on the sleeve of her robe. "All you have to do is ask."

Vince grinned. "I'll have to talk to Professor Sprout then. Double Herbology is a lot better than Ancient Runes!"

"Too bad Potions is required for 'most any decent job after school," Ted said. "That's a tough class."

"It's not the class as much as the teacher," put in a tall dark-haired girl.

"That depends on what House you're in, Millie," Tracey answered. "We all know it, and there's no gain in belaboring the point." She grinned suddenly and raised her voice slightly. "Who's trying out for Quidditch this year?"

A boy with long brown hair who was sitting next to her grinned back. "I will." He looked up at Severus. "Levin Crane, Chaser."

"I'll be there," Derek called from three seats up.

"Vince, we could use you and Greg as Beaters this year," Tracey said.

"I don't know," Vince said slowly. "I've got to concentrate on my classes."

Greg nodded. "I barely managed to make it through last year."

"We'll help you both study," Levin said. "Between all of us, we should be able to get you through everything. But we're not going have Buckley's Chance at the House Cup without you two as Beaters."

"I'm willing to give it a try," Greg said finally. "But you've got to help me with Transfiguration."

"What about you, Severus?" Vince asked. "You could play a reserve."

Severus shook his head. "I'm no good at Quidditch. I'll come to the matches and cheer you on."

"That'll do," Tracey laughed.

By this time, they were all polishing off their desserts. Ted turned to him as the older students began trickling out of the Great Hall. "I've got to chaperone the First Years, but Greg can show you to the Common Room."

"Come on," Vince said, getting to his feet. "We've got a lot to do. First night is always busy!"

Severus followed the other boys, careful to conceal the fact that he knew the way already. *I was wondering how this was going to work out. There's enough differences that I feel a little bit like a first year all over again. That's going to make it easier. I'm not supposed to know everything.*

The Common Room was much as he remembered it, though he did his best to avoid making mental comparisons. Lucius Professor Malfoy, Severus reminded himself was leaning against the edge of the fireplace waiting for them.

"Make yourselves comfortable," he said by way of greeting. "As soon as everyone gets here, we'll begin."

Severus found himself a seat on one of the three couches. Vince and Greg sat down next to him. The older boys he'd met on the train had appropriated one of the other couches. Other students dragged chairs over. In the middle of the shuffle, Ted arrived with a gaggle of first year students in tow. Soon enough, though, everyone was seated or otherwise comfortable.

"For you new students, welcome to Slytherin House," Lucius began. "You are in this House because you have a drive to succeed, to prove yourself. You have ambitions and dreams, and you will gain the wisdom here to see what is possible and what is not. Your ambitions will be honed and tempered, and you will be the sharpest members of wizarding society when you become adults."

"I am sure that over the course of your education here, you will have disputes with other members of Slytherin House. This is normal. However, they will be resolved quietly either in my office or here in our Common Room. I will not have it said that we do not know how to behave." His gaze swept around the room. "Do not pick quarrels with the other Houses, but do not become doormats either. Working together, you are stronger than any one of you alone."

Professor Slughorn never gave a speech like that, Severus thought to himself. *It was every man for himself.*

"At this point, we split up into groups by year," Lucius continued. "Talk with each other about what you want to accomplish. Get to know your year-mates. I will come by each group with your schedules."

Ted abandoned the first year students and perched on the arm of the sofa where Severus was sitting. Vince shifted over slightly, and Lavender squeezed herself into the corner. Tracey, Pansy, and the dark-haired girl he'd heard addressed as Millie dragged their chairs over forming a semi circle in front of them.

"It's good to be back," Ted said. "Severus, this is Millie Bulstrode. Millie, this is Severus. He's new this year. We rode together on the train."

Millie nodded, and stuck out a heavy hand. Her palm was rough and calloused. Severus studied her covertly as she sat back down again. She wasn't at all pretty, he decided, but her face had character.

"So let's get started," Tracey said. "I'm still planning to play professional Quidditch after school. Over the summer, I managed to get an interview with the coach of the Red Dragons. Their Seeker is planning to retire in a few years, so I've got a chance to get in as a reserve."

"I spent the summer working in my Dad's Herbology store," Vince volunteered. "I think he's planning to hand it over to me when he retires. I'm not sure I want to actually run the place. I like working with the plants."

"Hire someone to handle the business part of it," Millie suggested. "Then you take care of the plants, and they manage the rest of it. My brother will be taking over Dad's business, but I'll be doing the product testing."

"I'm going to become a fashion designer for Bourke & Brown," Lavender said. "My father has no idea what witches want to wear these days! He's planning to put some of

my designs into production this year and hire me officially once I finish school."

"Oh that's great news, Lav," Tracey said. "You'd been worried that he'd want you to do something else. What about you, Severus? What do you want to do?"

"I want to become a Potions Master," he replied slowly. "I want to do research and experimentation. To develop new potions and enhance existing ones." His eyes lit up as his passion for the subject warmed him. "I want to recreate Roger Bacon's elixirs!"

"That's going to take lots of work," Greg said.

"And money to set up a lab," Ted added. "And to live on while you're doing your experiments."

"You'll need to get into one of the academies for advanced studies," Tracey mused aloud. "or an Apprenticeship with an established Master."

"You won't learn anything from Professor Black," Vince contributed glumly. "He really doesn't know anything about Potions. He just assigns what's in the book."

"Well," Severus said slowly, "I'll have to keep my skills sharp on my own time." He looked over at Greg. "What about you?"

"Me? I'm apprenticing with Mr. Ollivander to become a wandmaker. He's already agreed." Greg leaned forward enthusiastically. "Mother was thrilled when I told her! She said that Mr. Ollivander frightened off his last apprentice. I have all sorts of ideas for making better wands!"

"I'm going to find a rich wizard and get married so I don't have to work," Pansy said decisively. "Honestly, after five years in Slytherin, that's the height of my ambition!"

Lavender tilted her head toward the seventh-years across the room. "Try Levin Crane. He's going into the family business, I heard. They work for Gringotts doing all the spell-maintenance. Or you could try Derek, but he'll be working for his father for several years before he finally takes over the store."

Severus had not expected Lavender's matter-of-fact reply in the least. He'd been braced for someone to sneer at Pansy's obvious laziness and self-serving goal. Then he remembered what had happened on the train. These Slytherins were serious about working together.

"I," Ted announced, "am still going to open a pet store in Hogsmeade. It will be good for Eeylops to have some competition." He shrugged. "Hagrid's agreed to sell me a breeding pair of Nifflers to help get started. Just don't expect me to have coatl eggs anytime soon. I'd love to know how they got that one."

Millie rolled her eyes. "Potter's dad bought it for him. I saw them walking out of the store with it."

"Oh that's a shame," Vince groaned. "Potter is a terrible pet owner. He'll probably pay Professor Hagrid to take care of it."

"He doesn't even bother to give treats to his owl when she brings him his mail," Tracey muttered. "Too bad we can't... borrow... the egg until it hatches."

Ted ran a hand over the dark stubble along his jaw. "Professor Malfoy wouldn't appreciate all the trouble that would cause, unfortunately." He paused significantly. "But..."

"But what?" Lavender asked curiously.

"I could ask Professor Hagrid to let me help him with it as a special project." He shrugged. "Assuming Potter doesn't try to hatch it himself."

"A much better idea," Lucius said as he stopped behind them and began handing out their class schedules. "Not only will it cause me fewer problems, but it will be an excellent project for you. Mr. Snape, I have your Hogsmeade permission slip already. Thank you."

Severus nodded. *I knew he wouldn't forget!*