

# Seas of Green

*by psykiapa*

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## Chapter One: Reminisce

*Chapter 1 of 6*

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*Chapter One:*

*Reminisce*

Harry rolled over, the silk of the sheets sliding pleasantly over his skin. His eyes took in the opalescent feeling of these covers. The soft snores of his dorm mates were nothing like what he was used to, and somehow that made them incredibly intimidating.

Not even Crabbe and Goyle snored as badly as Ron.

It was time to wake up. No one else was awake. Harry wasn't hungry. He wasn't tired. And he wasn't comfortable in this extremely comfortable bed.

The golden edges of morning were starting to creep in around his consciousness; the early morning sky was just now starting to take on that hazy, dreamlike beauty that he remembered watching from afar. It should be, but Harry knew that it wasn't, and he doubted that anything could be so beautiful as the Gryffindor sunrises.

His clock on the bedside table said three A.M.

Restless and entirely awake, Harry rolled over again. This bed was too comfortable. He'd never slept in something so comfortable in his life. He'd always thought that beds were supposed to be somewhere between hard and soft; not this strange softness that left you feeling as if you were floating. This wasn't supposed to feel so good. It was supposed to be hard and stiff and something that he'd never want to sleep in again.

That thought brought Harry to several unsatisfactory conclusions about his own traitorous subconscious.

*"No one's been re-sorted in ages," Ron had told him, dismissing the subject blithely.*

Harry shook his head. Ron should go away. But he couldn't, because he was as far as Ron could be right now.

No, that's not true. He wasn't nearly as far as Sirius or his parents. Ron wasn't dead.

Harry remembered with perfect clarity the journey to Hogwarts, wild forest rushing past in a whirlwind of dull greens and browns, and Ron had been talking animatedly about Quidditch and who the new captain would be.

*As the first years had finished taking their seats, Dumbledore stood and cleared his throat.*

*"Good evening! Welcome to Hogwarts. Before I can allow you to eat your rather good suppers, I have a few announcements to make.*

*"To all first years, and those who seem to have forgotten over the years, the forest on the grounds is quite beautiful, but very dangerous. No student is allowed to enter the Forbidden Forest unless they have the permission of a teacher. Furthermore, while the security of Hogwarts has been improved, there is no excuse for any student to allow themselves to be put in any more danger than they absolutely must. Any student found outside their common rooms without specific permission from a teacher to be there will be punished harshly.*

*"I cannot plead the importance of these rules in our troubled times enough, and will do my best to insure the safety of all of my students."*

*Ron groaned loudly next to Harry as Dumbledore's speech seemed to roll on. Hermione shushed him, and Harry swore he could sense a heightened twinkle in Dumbledore's eyes as he started once again.*

*"As many of you have undoubtedly read, there will be a re-sorting of the fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh years taking place after the meal. This is an old tradition that has been out of Hogwarts practice for many years, but I and the Board of Governors have decided that now would be a good time to re-implant it in our practices. In following years, we will only re-sort the fourth years, but we must catch up on lost time. I will ask those students who are to be re-sorted to stay after our feast to complete the ceremony in privacy.*

*"Thank you, and enjoy your meal."*

The clock was not moving fast enough. These hours were starting to drive him mad.

The feast had been almost as unpleasant as the ceremony; people hailing him as their hero as he passed them, shouting out questions about whether or not he wanted anything from them. Harry never really did, but he didn't feel like telling them to go away.

Perhaps things would have been easier if he had. It might not have been such a surprise.

*Harry had tried to calm his mind. He did all he could. He imagined a cold night's rain tapping against his bedroom window, a soothing noise that called to him and comforted him, telling him not to think of anything else, that it wasn't needed ...*

*"Potter, Harry."*

*The rain was a thunderstorm, and he had just been struck by lightning.*

*Calming his mind again as he strode toward the stool, fighting to remain in control, he thought he saw Ron give him the thumbs-up out of the corner of his eye ...*

*Harry followed McGonagall into the side hall they had waited in as first years. She closed the door, and Harry noticed a small stool was sitting in the middle of it with the Sorting Hat perched precariously upon it.*

*And his vision went dark.*

*"Hello, Potter. It seems you haven't been doing as well as expected in Gryffindor."*

*Clouds. Thunder. Rain. Peace.*

*"Clever, clever, very clever. You are hoping that I will see your bravery, but your cunning is more apparent by the second. You should have, from the beginning, been in SLYTHERIN!"*

Harry opened his eyes as he realized that it actually was raining. The rain was lashing the upper floors. It was hard to hear the thunder from the dungeons.

Not many things were beautiful these days. He couldn't even enjoy a thunderstorm as he once had.

There was a cough from the other bed.

Malfoy? Was he awake too?

The boy gave a short dreamish noise and rolled over, falling back to sleep with the weight of someone who's had too much mulled wine.

Harry exhaled, not having realized he was holding his breath.

Malfoy could be a real prat, and now that Harry had to live with him, it was much more important not to get on his bad side.

Harry rolled over.

After a while, he checked the clock again.

3:45 am.

It was bloody ridiculous.

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The showers didn't leave much to imagination.

Everything in the Slytherin rooms was entirely too ... sleek. Harry had expected the baths to be smaller versions of the Prefect bathrooms.

They were just a few showers lined up in rows. There was one large bath, but it only had two taps; one for water, the other for foam. The bath looked much too ominous for

his very first day in Slytherin; he opted for one of the larger shower stalls. The idea of being joined by Crabbe or Goyle was traumatizing without having to actually go through it.

*"Potter! When do you wash? Morning or evening?"*

*Harry had blinked and responded slowly.*

*"Whenever I feel like it. I'm awake so early and late that it doesn't really matter anyway."*

Malfoy had glared at him, rolled his eyes, and gone back to conversation.

Harry turned on the water.

He resented that his life was pretty much going to be controlled by Draco Malfoy until the end of his seventh year. He turned on the tap.

Pain ran over his face. His back. His legs. His chest.

The water was boiling!

It had never been able to get this hot in the Gryffindor tower; it was too far away from the boilers.

Harry had never thought about Hogwarts' plumbing system since his second year. He wondered if the Slytherins had worked it out that they were showering with a Muggle invention. Probably not.

He hadn't been in Slytherin for a day before he realized that the house-elves must be absolutely overworked. The wardrobes were twice the size of those found in Gryffindor, the furnishings much newer looking. The beds were huge, with seven pillows (four large, three decorative), and had a giant turned headboard, filled with ornate carvings. The wood must have been ebony, or reproduced ebony, for they were blacker than he had ever seen a bed before and had a very rich purplish brown undertone. The bedding was so huge it could have fit two of him.

Harry wasn't quite sure what to do with all the space.

The Slytherins also had an extra common room for fifth years up apparently for those who wished to study quietly with friends. Harry hadn't seen anyone there yet.

Zabini had been the one forced to show Harry his way around the rooms.

*He angrily pointed important things out to him, obviously wishing it to be over.*

*At the end of the hall of boy's dorms there was a spiral staircase that went up to the upperclassmen's dorms. Zabini explained this curtly to Harry, who wanted nothing more than to draw the curtains of his four-poster and lose himself there.*

*"At the end of the hall is the upperclassman's common room; it's mostly used for study groups. It's for fifth years up. Don't go in there if you're going to be loud."*

*Harry nodded.*

*"This is our dorm. Your trunk's already in." Blaise opened the door to a dormitory that was very much like Harry's old one had been, but without the warmth.*

*The beds seemed to be constructed from ebony rather than mahogany, and the hangings were a dark, deep green that Harry had to admit was very rich. The comforter matched, but his pillows were an assortment of greens, silvers, and black. The sheets were black silk.*

*"Bathrooms off to the side; you're the closest bed to them. Draco's bed is next to yours. Make sure you don't bother him."*

*Keep quiet, head down, mind your own business.*

*This is how he would survive.*

The dorm was freezing as Harry scrambled back into his pyjamas to look for a uniform he could wear.

He changed quickly, cursing all the while, wishing his hair and skin would have dried rather than crystallized. He saw Malfoy turn over and blearily open his eyes.

"Be quiet, will you?"

"Sorry," Harry muttered.

"Idiot," Malfoy snarled and rolled over again, pushing a pillow against his ear.

Harry quickly tied his tie, remembering the discussion he had overheard last night. None of the Slytherins were too keen on the new Muggle addition to their uniforms. Grey trousers, black work shoes, a starch white shirt, grey sweater-vest and tie in house colors. Harry doubted that any of them really knew how to tie a tie.

Harry threw on his clothes for the day and decided to get an early start on his project. He hadn't had access to a library as expansive as Hogwarts' all summer and had been mulling his plan over without even knowing whether it was possible or not. His book bag was heavy across his shoulders, the Invisibility Cloak stifling over its weight as he made his way down to the library in the middle of the night.

When he arrived at the heavy doors, he found them locked and performed a quick Alohomora charm.

There weren't too many students who would already be keen on studying.

But Harry knew that he needed to be. If things were going to work this year, he had to educate himself, and fast. If what he thought he could do would work, he needed to know everything he could about it.

He searched the library by wandlight, looking for the section he needed.

*Mind magic, mind magic ...*

It was buried far at the back and on the second landings. Apparently it wasn't a subject that most Hogwarts students delved into. The books were coated with dust. Harry grabbed the first book he could find, sat at the nearest table, and read.

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Harry didn't notice he was late for breakfast until Madame Pince came into the library.

She didn't notice the faint brush of invisible material as he walked past her.

Before Harry reached the Great Hall, he grabbed at his cloak and stuffed it into his bookbag. He'd have to make an appearance there eventually; avoiding it would only make things harder.

Ron wasn't happy at all. Harry hoped that he didn't have to share classes with him.

*When Harry returned from the hall, he treaded over to Ron and Hermione wearily, shock evident on his face.*

*"Harry, glad to have you back. Seamus and I were just arguing about ..." Ron's voice trailed off in Harry's ears. Ron's mouth was still moving, but Harry couldn't hear what it was saying. Hermione was looking at him with worry on her face.*

*"Harry? Are you okay?"*

*Harry looked up at her, and she gasped slightly. His tie had turned itself green with silver accents, and Ron narrowed his eyes. Harry laughed, trying to hide his hysteric panic.*

*"Why do you ask?"*

*Harry's voice cracked mid-sentence. Hermione's concerned look deepened. Harry could see the pleas forming behind her eyes, the 'whys' and 'how did this happens' ...*

*"I've been re-sorted into Slytherin."*

*Her brow furrowed, and her grip on his arm tightened slightly. He looked at his feet, fearing Ron's reaction, fearing hers, and when he looked up, Ron was being called to the Sorting himself.*

*He doubted he would ever forget that final look on Ron's face. There was confusion, and betrayal, and a number of other emotions he never wanted to see there again. Hermione didn't let go of his arm.*

The Hall was noisy and boisterous, far more so than any morning he remembered.

A slight hush came over the Gryffindor table when Harry settled at the very end of the Slytherin table, his head down.

Harry tried not to notice that his old house was staring at him.

Snape was already distributing new schedules to the younger classmen, who sneered at having to take classes they didn't want or thanked him curtly. He would be moving on to the sixth years next. Harry had worked out his schedule last night.

Transfiguration was first for Harry. Great. He really didn't want to deal with this first thing in the morning ... the Gryffindors would be angry, he just knew it.

Transfiguration, Defense, lunch, a free period afterwards, and then Languages with Professor Vector. He wondered if Hermione would be in the class as well.

Snape was speaking with Pansy Parkinson. She seemed fairly excited at his suggestions.

*"You'll be sleeping with the other sixth year boys; luckily we have room left in their dormitory," Snape sneered the word "luckily," as if it was not lucky at all. And it really wasn't. "The password is Serpentine, which should be easy enough for anyone to remember."*

*"Perhaps we should set up his schedule now, to allow Potter tomorrow to get used to his new settings," McGonagall told Snape briskly. Harry privately thanked her.*

*"Very well." Snape drew out a blank timetable and McGonagall magicked his OWL results to him. Harry felt his spirits fall even lower when Snape read over them.*

*"You've received top marks in Defense. Would you like that to be your focus?" Snape asked.*

*Harry nodded, looking anywhere but at Snape's face.*

*Sounds of scribbling; Snape had just put him into Defense.*

*"What sort of Defense are you looking for?" McGonagall added helpfully, throwing a reproachful look at Snape.*

*"Certainly not an Auror. You don't have the potions capabilities or the grades, and "*

*"With Professor Slughorn teaching Advanced Potions, yes, he does," McGonagall snapped.*

*"I was thinking of education," Harry mumbled.*

*Snape's eyebrows raised.*

*"Education?" He clarified, his tones getting menacingly quiet.*

*"Or curse breaking. But being an Auror still has its appeal."*

*Harry hated the blood rushing to his face. Passionately hated it.*

*"You'll need to be in top form in academics; all of the jobs you're looking at require top notch education. I know you'll need to take our Languages crash course. I daresay that Professor Vector will have room. History of Magic as well ... Binns isn't particularly picky about who he accepts into his sixth year. You could always contest your abysmal OWL History score. Should we automatically sign you up for all the classes you passed into?"*

*McGonagall glanced at his OWLs.*

*"He won't need Care of Magical Creatures or Divination. But with Slughorn teaching Potions this year, I'm sure he could make it in his class." McGonagall glared at Snape as she told him this, and Snape scribbled Harry into Slughorn's Potions class. "That leaves him open for an Independent Study in Defense or Languages. Which would you prefer, Potter?"*

*"Uhm .... Defense, if you don't mind."*

*"Good choice. You'll need it. I would also suggest spending extra time with your languages; reviewing Runes wouldn't be too bad of an idea, though there isn't room in that class. I'm sure Professor Vector could give you some study sheets. You'll have to set up your I.S. this week, or it won't go through. Show it to Professor Snape once you have all your plans ready, and you'll be squared away for the rest of the year." McGonagall stepped away from the desk briskly. "I must go speak with my Gryffindors now, if*

*you don't mind. Good night."*

*"Thank you, McGonagall," Snape dismissed her, and Harry was left alone with him.*

*"Follow me, I must make a speech to the rest of the Slytherins, but first I order you not to push the line. Not one Slytherin will put up with you this year, and you are in a very dangerous situation. Do you agree?"*

Harry agreed.

The Transfiguration classroom was halfway across the school and up several flights of stairs. If he wanted to get there early, he'd have to leave now.

Somehow, he wasn't buzzing with anticipation like he usually was on the first day of school. Normally he, Ron, and Hermione would be thinking about what they'd end up studying in the next year, and how they'd manage to survive Potions. This time around, Harry didn't have to worry about Potions, and Hermione wasn't going on about their new classes.

"Harry!"

Hermione?

Harry turned slowly on his heel, to make sure this wasn't a joke.

"You ... are talking to me?"

"Of course I'm talking to you." She walked towards him, rolling her eyes. "What's your first class?"

Harry, startled she had even taken the chance to talk to him, snapped himself out of his daze.

"Transfiguration."

"Oh, that's what we've got."

Harry caught the note of anxiety in her voice.

"Good I found you, then. I guess I just thought I'd better warn you. Ron's not happy, and neither is Seamus. You know how they can be, and they're being even worse than usual." Her voice sounded strange to Harry, choked up and frustrated. He'd never heard her talk like this.

She looked down the hall, her eyes fuzzing over, and Harry heard some other Gryffindors coming.

"I've got to go; I'm still your friend, don't worry about me. Just ... I don't know, keep your head down and I'll try to talk Ron into being supportive. I don't know how much I'll be able to do, though."

"Thanks, Hermione."

Hermione gave him a quick hug and ran off, and Harry had to remind himself that he should wait to follow her for a bit.

He could hear Dean and Seamus laughing about something ahead, and wondered what it was about.

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*Potter's left the Hall.*

Draco couldn't say he wasn't grateful. He hadn't thought he'd be able to handle him for more than fifteen minutes. Perhaps not even that long.

Pansy was primping herself next to him. No matter what she does, she always looks like a cow.

"Draco, what class do you have first?" Blaise asked him from the other side of Pansy.

"Transfiguration, as always. You?"

"The same."

He looked back down at his breakfast, plucking at the eggs. They were disgustingly dry.

"I never would have guessed it; you're quite rotten in the subject," Draco sneered.

Blaise smirked at him; it was certainly common knowledge that he'd done something awful to that OWL judge.

Draco smirked back. It wasn't unexpected.

"I suppose we'll have to deal with Potter then, too. All Gryffindors get a free ride into Transfiguration."

Pansy simpered in her seat; she obviously had not been able to make it. McGonagall was always particularly hard on her.

"You look absolutely fabulous today, Draco, if you don't mind me saying so," she said, leaning closer to him.

"Why, thank you, but don't you think it's a bit early in the year to be starting in on this, Parkinson? We haven't even gone to our first class."

She batted her eyelashes. It wasn't appealing in the slightest.

*I must have been mad to ever have fallen for her.* Draco grimaced at the thought. *Twice.*

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Harry reached the classroom in more than enough time; McGonagall had opened the door and Harry filed in silently behind her.

Choosing a spot at the back, Harry took his bag off his shoulder and put it to the side of his chair.

Every once in a while, a student would look back at him as they filed into the room, but he busied himself with leafing through his Transfiguration book. He hadn't read through it enough, and he needed something to make himself occupied. Perhaps no one would bother him if he were thoroughly uninteresting.

He could feel the glares, the sneers; the jeers were plain to anyone who listened, but he would not look up. He knew who they were, why they were glaring, but didn't want to admit it. Not yet. Not now.

So, instead, he buried his eyes in his book to be sure they couldn't see his sadness.

What was he thinking? There was no sadness to see.

Denial is bliss.

His thoughts were interrupted when Malfoy and Zabini showed up, closest to being late as they could while receiving nothing but a reproachful glance from McGonagall. Normally points would have been taken. This time, they weren't.

"Well, congratulations to you all for passing your OWL. This year, preparation for the NEWTs will take place above all, and it will not be easy, and it will not be fun, but the rewards are surely worth it."

"To any of you who have an empty class period or are wishing to take an Independent Study in Transfiguration, I am more than happy to act as supervisory professor. I highly suggest the Independent Study if you plan to go on to University or straight into the Ministry of Magic. In both cases it is important to show dedication to your choice of study. For those of you with jobs already set up for after graduation, you may want to leave the idea for now. Sometimes it is best to pace oneself." She moved through the class, glancing at students every once in a while.

"However, should you wish to explore the idea, I offer my services. All study plans are due to Professor Dumbledore by the end of next week with a professor's signature."

McGonagall looked around the room and gave the smallest of smiles to Hermione.

"Now, we will be studying very advanced forms of transfiguration this year, including several very vital clues to the art of the Metamorphmagus. Next year, we will be studying in depth what it takes to become an Animagus. But for now, we should start on a good foot with some much-needed review ..."

Harry grabbed a quill and started to take notes; perhaps Advanced Transfiguration wouldn't be as dull as he had thought.

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Harry's Charms class was interesting; Flitwick had decided now was a good time to introduce them to do wordless incantations. Most people were having problems with this, but Harry wondered if it was simply a question of needing to do it, or lack of confidence. He'd have to do some more reading in the book on Occlumency and Meditation that he'd found. He had a feeling the two were linked.

He wondered if this was how Hermione thought.

Lunch was a slight fiasco, but he'd managed to ignore Ron and the rest of the disapproving Gryffindors, and soon he ended up in the library with a blank sheet of parchment in front of him. Harry had a feeling that the free period he had after lunch was meant to be used for his Independent Study; he had one every day after lunch except for Wednesdays, when he had a speech class instead. Why he'd been forced to take that, he had no idea. Probably something to do with his wish to go into education.

This part of the library was eerily quiet. No one really seemed all that interested in visiting it so early in the year. But Harry knew that he had to get his I.S. sorted out. If he didn't do it now, it was highly unlikely that he ever would.

Harry dipped his quill into his ink and held it over the page.

He started to write, not really knowing what he was doing.

*It has to be Defense, but what kind of Defense?*

*Perhaps ... tying into curse-breaking ... Celtic magic? Or Egyptian? Or African?*

*Celtic magic sounds more interesting.*

Celtic magic? It was a start.

*Follow your instincts.*

Madame Pince was reading a novel behind her desk.

"Excuse me, is there any way I could get hold of some books on multicultural magic?"

The librarian looked at him out of the corner of her eyes, eyeing him up. He rarely asked her for anything.

"That section is on the second floor."

She got up, winced, and took hold of Harry's arm. Two flights of stairs up, and all the way around to the very back of the library.

"Look all you want."

Harry nodded his thanks, smiling at her, and she left him to his own devices.

The first book he pulled out was written entirely in what looked like German. The second was an interesting blend of wizarding theology and ancient spellwork. Harry sat down and opened the book to the introduction.

*The ancient art of Celtic magic is not very simple, nor is it entirely complex. It is simply in the way that modern-day society views magic that makes learning a less traditional form more difficult ...*

Harry stilled in his chair, eyes widening as he read on.

He spent the rest of the afternoon cozily lounging in the library, his every breath hanging on each turn of the page as he swept from new idea to new idea to new idea.

The autumn air turned cold as he read, leaves starting to shrivel and brown, but he was miles away from all of that. A chill breeze rattled the window behind him. His regret that he hadn't told Ron and Hermione about his first sorting, his fears of life in Slytherin, and his anticipation of the challenging year ahead seemed to blow away with the summer; trepidation made much less real than what he was reading.

Harry didn't realize what he'd done until he had drank half his cup of tea.

The rather large window had been giving him light, but daylight was well past gone, and it must have been around seven.

Strange; strange, but gratifying.

Harry wondered what Hermione would think of him. A small smile spread across his face.

# Chapter Two: A Bargain

Chapter 2 of 6

Harry's first day as a Slytherin poses problems he expected and situations he didn't.

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*Chapter Two:*

*A Bargain*

Harry didn't realize how much danger his robes were in until the yogurt flew seemingly out of nowhere.

He had been having a quiet breakfast at the table, thinking to himself that it was great that they were allowed to go to Hogsmeade today, and then a large pinkish blob had come careening his way.

Some of it had fallen on his lips. Strawberry yogurt.

"Oops, I'm sorry," Blaise said, a smirk spreading over his face and his bowl rolling across the table.

The other Slytherins were laughing. Apparently it was an "accident."

Harry did the best he could to calm his temper, feeling a blush stain his cheeks; normally, by this point he would have screamed. Instead, Harry gave Blaise a sidelong glance and, remembering Professor Snape's warning, didn't say anything. All he could do was draw his wand and clean his robes, his hand shaking in anger.

Blaise smirked, malicious gratification written across his features.

"May I help you with something, Zabini?" Harry snarled, glaring out at Zabini.

"No. Nothing," he said innocently and walked away.

As breakfast continued, Harry found that this wasn't going to be the only time he was tested. Because it must have been testing, and if it wasn't that ... then it was just malignant fun. There had been the yogurt, Crabbe falling on him, the cherry pit that hit him in the temple, and finally, the leg that was stuck out so Harry would trip. Luckily Harry had good balance this morning, even if he wasn't really paying that much attention.

Soon Harry heard Hermione's voice echoing through his mind, telling him not to raise to the bait, that that was what they wanted. When he stopped reacting to their jeers and their tests, the Slytherins started to look slightly confused, and it was all Harry could do to keep a smile from his face.

The owls swooped in, carrying letters and packages from worried, devoted parents. Harry waited for the package to fall for Malfoy, but it never came. The other boy didn't show any emotion, just kept buttering his toast like it wasn't saturated enough. Clearly, things were not the same in the Malfoy household. Harry wondered what it felt like, but then Malfoy sent a scathing glare his way and lobbed the buttery toast at him.

Harry stopped wondering, and remembered exactly why he hated Malfoy so passionately.

A lone letter landed on top of Harry's plate.

He looked up, hoping to catch whatever owl had given it to him, but none were paying him any mind. There were too many to guess.

He recognized Mr. Weasley's careful handwriting, and the porridge he'd been eating congealed in his stomach.

He picked it up, slit the seal and turned it over as slowly as he could.

*Dear Harry,*

That at least didn't seem to be hostile.

*I hope that you're settling in well at Hogwarts, getting used to the food again and whatnot. Molly hopes that you're eating well; you wouldn't eat much when you stayed with us. She worries over your health. But perhaps I should get straight to the point.*

*Dumbledore told us about your re-sorting last night, and it must be awful. We want you to know that you're still welcome at our home come Christmas, regardless of what Ron or Ginny says. There were others that got re-sorted, but you're just the most public. Please try to remember that ...*

*Molly and I are fully supportive of you, and if you ever need to talk, don't be a stranger to us. We wait for a reply, and wish that you wouldn't be discouraged by Ron. He's probably going through a bit of denial right now.*

*We love you. Don't do anything drastic.*

*Arthur Weasley*

Harry folded the letter carefully and pulled out a bit of spare parchment. He put his quill to the paper, but couldn't think of what to say. When he realized that he had made a rather large blotch on the parchment, he quickly scrawled out an opening.

*Mr. Weasley,*

*I haven't really talked to Ron yet. I don't think he's very happy.*

*I won't do anything bad, and the Slytherins don't seem to be up to anything yet. At least, nothing that involves me. I'll write if there's anything to be worried about.*

*I don't have anything else to say, but it's a relief that you aren't angry with me. Hermione says that Ron is very angry, and I'm sorry. I've disappointed you all.*

He scratched out that last sentence. They wouldn't want to hear that.

*Thanks for the invitation to Christmas. We'll have to see how things are by then.*

*Cheers,*

*Harry*

Harry quickly folded his letter. He was expecting more mischief from the Slytherins this morning. It wouldn't be good to have to write it all over again.

Someone tipped the cream into the rest of his porridge.

He wasn't hungry anyway.

Several upper classmen were getting up and leaving, grabbing scarves and hats.

It was a Saturday, and a Hogsmeade day for the sixth and seventh years; they were allowed to run into town and pick up any books they would need for their new or unexpected classes. Snape had dropped a booklist into Harry's porridge. No one had told him that it was a Hogsmeade day. Harry decided that he should go.

The Slytherin dorms weren't that far from the Great Hall, and as soon as he got there Harry changed out of his school clothes and into something warmer for the fall weather. He wore old, grey, woolen muggle pants and a grungy old T-Shirt with a faded band from the seventies across the front. Harry thought it might have been Queen, but wasn't sure.

His shoes were the same trainers he had worn since he was fourteen and were crusted in old dirt; he'd used them for everything, including the Triwizard Tournament. They were dirty and didn't have arch support anymore. Harry thought that he should really buy new ones.

Throwing on a hoodie and grabbing his moneybag, he remembered the letter he had hurriedly written Mr. Weasley and quickly sidetracked to the Owlery. He wanted to send it out as soon as possible; he didn't want them to worry too much about him.

"Hey, if it isn't Potter himself. Out on a missive for your Slytherin chums?"

Ron.

Harry stood where he was, watching Ron walk toward him. Oh, he really hadn't wanted to meet up with him so soon ... Harry took a deep breath and tried really hard not to be angry.

"You know, this really is far too obvious. You weren't even wearing your invis-"

"What are you trying to prove, Ron?" Harry bit the question through gritted teeth.

"Nothing *you* haven't proven already. Now how about you give it up and run along that way? We all know what you were trying to do."

Harry furrowed his brows. Everyone knew what he was trying to do except himself.

"But of course, you wouldn't want to stay away from them for too long." Ron's eyes took on a watery quality.

Harry tried to keep walking, knowing that if he didn't, things would only get worse, and they'd both snap. But Seamus and Dean were on either side of Ron, and they quickly blocked his way. Seamus looked highly amused. Dean was scowling; Harry couldn't tell exactly what he was scowling about.

"You're not getting away so easily. Where are you going this early? Are you already planning something else?"

Harry steadied Ron with a stare. Seamus started to shift uncomfortably, shooting glances at Dean.

"You are the most arrogant person I have ever met," Harry said, trying to push past Ron, but Ron caught him by the shoulder.

Seamus was looking rapidly between Harry and Ron, and Dean finally made a move.

"Ron, I really want to get to Hogsmeade. Why don't we just go?" Dean asked, pushing a bit to pass them, and Seamus reluctantly followed.

Ron blinked a few times, fazed, but the sneer was back in place.

"Oh, you'd say that *now*, now that you and *Malfoy* are such good buddies."

"Clear the way," Harry snarled.

"I bet you were just scampering off to follow him into town so you could all have a good laugh about the bloody Gryffindors. I bet "

"Didn't I tell you to shove off? Now do it. Clear the way,*Weasley*."

Harry pushed past him, face red and shoulders tense. Ron flushed, but didn't say anything. Harry didn't let himself look back.

*Think of storm clouds, dark and menacing in the distance, with the cool pattering of rain on the ceiling ...*

Lightning striking that disgusting emotion off of Ronald Weasley's face.

These thoughts weren't peaceful. Focus on ... feet. Yes, the ground, where he was going, there were stairs, and he could hear footsteps going away from him ... Harry was climbing the steps to the Owlery, and was soothed by a low voice.

"There you are."

Malfoy?

Harry froze in the door.

Malfoy was untying a vial of liquid from an owl's leg.



An eagle owl.

Throwing it up into the air and catching it, a triumphant look on his face, Malfoy turned toward the door. Harry automatically flattened himself against the wall. It wasn't enough.

"Potter."

Malfoy glared harshly, obviously seething.

"How much did you see, Potter?"

Harry didn't know what to say; if he made Malfoy angry, his year would be miserable. He knew that much. That and he wouldn't find out anything more, so ... a sneer. Yes, a sneer would fit well. He felt his features contort into what he really hoped was a decent sneer.

Malfoy started to slink across the room, his eyebrows knitting and his lips turned down in frustration. Harry raised his chin, and Malfoy was standing right by him.

"How much?"

The words were dangerously low.

Malfoy narrowed his eyes and they searched Harry, who really couldn't think of anything to say, let alone do, other than to taunt him ...

"You won't know anything by the time this is over."

Harry reeled back and felt himself slam against the wall. Everything went black before Malfoy could even draw his wand.

\*\*

*Blackness, cold, sweet blackness and bruised skin against bruised skin.*

*There was no noise, no sound, no thought. He was somewhere that wasn't really anywhere, and suddenly he was someone who wasn't anyone.*

"Harry?"

*A voice. A voice? Who was that?*

*"What are you doing here, Harry? You aren't supposed to be here."*

*Gently soothing screams.*

*"You know this place less than I do, and I still can't find my way through the darkness."*

"Who are you?"

*"Remember your name, Harry Potter. Remember your name."*

\*\*

Harry woke up stiff and covered in owl droppings. The letter was still clutched in his hand, and the last thing he could remember was that voice in his face telling him he didn't know anything.

Had it been Malfoy to knock him out, or had he done it to himself?

Harry rubbed at his aching head, soothing the lines of worry and confusion away with the palm of his hand. His glasses were laying somewhere near the wall.

The wall where ...

The wall where he'd hidden. Or tried to hide.

But that wasn't good enough, that wasn't nearly good enough, that didn't explain anything. Where was this ground? He must have fallen pretty badly to have gone this far ... For his glasses to be all the way over there and for he himself to be all the way over here.

It was a wonder they weren't broken, and that the letter wasn't more crumpled than it was.

There were scatterings of clean ground just in the right spots for a foot to have been there. Someone had run. Running seemed natural.

"Dammit," Harry whispered, quietly seething and trying to right himself, embarrassed when he started to remember exactly what had happened.

Why the hell did Malfoy have to do that? And how the hell had he ended up on the floor? Clearly, he had hit his head hard. He was laying on the floor, covered in bird shit. That must mean that they had met up in the Owlery ... He tried to remember what he was originally there for. Ah yes, the letter.

He found Hedwig hooting at him on the floor. She flew up and he held out his arm, letting her know he was okay.

She had fluttered down sometime when he had been thinking ... when exactly? Harry couldn't know. His head was aching, and he felt like screaming in rage, or crying in humiliation, but he wouldn't. She was rubbing her head on his hand, and he smiled at her. She was still a good friend. That was one thing he knew, and right now, knowing something was a very good feeling.

\*\*

Hogsmeade was bubbling over with teenage girls.

Harry tried to figure out how he'd never realized how many of them there were in the upper years with him.

Cho walked by the café with a group of her friends.

Harry almost missed the Stomach Acrobatics.

The only reason he really wanted her to say hello was to know what emotion to feel. He really didn't know what she would say to him if she did come over. Just as well. His emotions had been all jumbled up ever since he'd woken in the Owlery, and his memory had not entirely come back. He must have hit his head very hard to not remember everything ... What he could remember was Malfoy, with a letter, and with ... something? It was important, he knew it must be, but why ... why was it important?

Harry took another sip of the steaming hot chocolate. He had hoped that maybe it would jerk his memory, but nothing had happened, no great epiphanies, and he was left

sitting outside this little café in Hogsmeade wishing that he had never gone to the Owlery in the first place, wishing that he didn't have this memory to recover. He had to admit, it made him feel more than a little stupid.

Maybe he would remember later. If it was important he would figure it out. And Malfoy had been so angry ...

Harry sighed. He was getting nowhere.

He got up, left some change on the table for a tip, and grabbed his bag.

There was a reason he had come here today, and that was to get his new books.

Who convinced him to go into curse breaking? It was a hell of a lot of classwork, but then again, his other option was the Auror business.

Right. Bill. Was it Bill that had convinced him? He couldn't remember, but what he could remember of the encounter was intrigue, or something like that. Perhaps it was one of those ever-dramatic life-changing events that Harry should very well have remembered. He supposed that he had so many of those recently that it was hard to keep track of which ones were life-changing in which ways.

Or perhaps that was just his confusion.

He didn't care enough to know today.

A darkly brown, crumpled leaf fell past him as he walked.

He made his way down the road, the bluster of the day playing with his scarf, his feet crunching the leaves that already lay on the ground. There were people hurrying from place to place, laughing, whispering together. He couldn't help but feel that every time they looked at him it got to be a bit more malicious. There was something wrong with people who were having a good time noticing someone alone and not caring. Or, rather, laughing. Harry tried not to let it get him down. It was a fine fall day.

The bell rang metallically as Harry stepped into Sheaf and Leaf bookshop.

The noise was even more pronounced in here. Everyone was loud. Clerks were yelling to one another to grab more books on Charms or Transfiguration, or blanching as students asked where a lesser-used section was. Harry saw definite benefits to using a library.

Harry quickly found the Transfiguration, Charms, and Defense Against the Dark Arts sections, grabbing books that had been on the standard list.

It was when he came to the dictionaries that it began to be a problem. He needed several, and he was supposed to pick up something on Runes ...

Harry walked up to a salesperson, but when he saw how flustered the man was, thought better of his idea. He'd just have to find it himself.

That was no easy feat, considering how many people were in the bookstore. Perhaps that was a good thing; no one would pay him much mind, and that was something Harry had always appreciated. People jostled around him, sent apologies *apologies!* over their shoulders. That hadn't happened to him yet this year.

The magical languages section was carefully hidden in the middle of the store, right by Arithmancy and Astronomy, which didn't really make much sense to Harry, but he supposed it was a useful place for it. The more academic subjects were put together.

*Dwarvish, fae, elvish, French, German, Japanese, Arabic, Spanish, Latin ...*

Harry's eyes bulged. He hadn't realized he needed so many books. He supposed that seeing as how this was a "crash course" no one had ever really mentioned it before; he was sure that it was only offered for sixth and seventh years he'd be learning at a very rapid pace, but no one had ever told him anything about this. Students must have discussed it with their Heads of House last year ... and he feared his dreams of becoming an Auror were pretty much shot.

This summer he had realized that being an Auror was not the only profession for Defense majors. While he had talked to Bill, a new window had opened up for him. He hadn't even realized the things he could go into that still involved a heavy Defense background.

Doing what was expected had gotten to be a bit of a fault of his; last year's adventure had proven that. He didn't want to become so predictable that he would be an even easier target than he already was, and becoming an Auror was one good way of doing exactly what was expected of him. Being predictable had its downfalls, and he needed to learn how to surprise people.

*Off to a good start there,* he thought sarcastically.

Harry grabbed as many books as he could, but they ended up toppling from his arms. Annoyed, he bent to gather them.

This would have to be an exact science until he could get up to the desk and shove them in his bag ...

"And that's when Potter walked in."

"What did you do?"

"I knocked him flat, is what I did."

Malfoy. Zabini. Pansy. He could recognize their polished shoes.

"Draco."

"Oh, you know me too well." A chuckle. "He passed out. Probably scared. Either that or he's got some major shit in his head from that battle last spring. Most likely that he was having a flashback. You know, like that Moody guy."

Snickering.

"Are you worried?"

"Of course not. Why would I be? My mother just wanted to send me a present. Being in Azkaban, it would have been very hard for father to send it through her to the Great Hall; just plain stupid."

"Are you sure we should be talking about this here?"

Pansy. She was smarter than she let on.

"No one's listening; busy places are the best and easiest places to hide."

That smirk was almost audible.

"So how was Italy, Blaise? I never got to ask." Pansy again.

"It was brilliant. Saw some of my mum's friends, relatives. Of course, we didn't get to go into Africa. That would just be stupid, what with all the ..." They were walking past him.

Harry carefully grabbed at his books. He piled them into his arms, and stood up. His school bag was settled awkwardly at his hip, but it'd have to wait until he had paid for his books before adjusting it. They were so precariously balanced that he doubted they would stay in his arms if he attempted to save his hip from strangulation.

There was a line about five people long. Not too bad, considering how many students had come into the shop right away.

Harry waited, tapping his foot, and finally the desk clerk called him up.

"Next!"

Harry scooted forward, his books falling out of his arms and onto the counter.

"Blimey. They sure do take Languages seriously." The boy mumbled to himself; he was just young enough for Harry to wonder if he should be recognizing him from Hogwarts.

"That'll be thirty Gal "

The shop clerk had looked up, and didn't continue. Harry rolled his eyes in annoyance and busied himself with digging in his money pouch.

"You're Harry Potter."

Harry glanced up at the boy through his bangs. "Yes."

"Well, then I'm sorry for staring. I just didn't expect you to be so small." Harry let out a huff of annoyance, but then the boy continued. "Or cool."

Harry blinked at the boy.

"You ... think I'm cool?"

"Well, of course I do. I expected you to have only the best of clothes, a gaggle of friends, and an attitude that would make everyone stare."

Harry glanced back up at him again, setting his money on the counter to be taken. Did this boy honestly think he was cool? Was he stupid not to have noticed Harry's annoyance earlier?

"I take it you didn't go to Hogwarts."

The boy smiled at him.

"No, I was tutored." The boy handed him a receipt and met his eyes for the first time. "My name's Dom. You should stop in some time when we're not so busy."

Harry nodded, puzzled, and took his books (some time in there Dom had put them in a bag for him) and left the crowded shop.

Dom had liked him. And Harry hadn't really minded Dom. He might just stop in.

He had also been treated like a person.

Harry growled at how much he was reminding himself of a schoolgirl. He had bigger things to worry about.

\*\*

Harry didn't leave the coffee shop until it was nearly time for dinner in the Great Hall.

The sun was starting to go down, and he hurried his pace. He wasn't supposed to be out after dark, and for once, he was looking forward to a meal. He hadn't eaten much since he got to Hogwarts, and his stomach was starting to protest.

Harry shifted the weight of the bag in his hands and the schoolbag that was strung across his back.

His stomach growled in impatience.

\*\*

Draco watched Harry Potter walk into the Great Hall, his book bags both full.

Pansy was simpering again. She could really get to be annoying when there wasn't another thing to distract him.

"Hey, look who finally decided to show."

Draco's friends turned to watch Potter settle closer to them than any of them wanted. For Draco, however, it was perfect.

"Looking a little worse for wear, are you?"

Potter was ignoring him. Draco did not like to be ignored.

"Answer me!"

"Just a little tired, that's all."

Draco gave a look around the table and laughed.

"Of course he's tired! Never sleeps, that one." Draco looked back to him, sneering in distaste. "You all should be careful around him; there's no knowing what lengths he'll go to. Whether it's to get his friends back, or have a nasty shag, we'll never know."

Harry looked back at his dinner.

"Or maybe he can do both," Pansy crowed.

Draco watched Harry carefully, waiting for him to snap. If he let something slip about this morning, maybe Draco could guess how much he'd heard ...

But the boy didn't do anything; he just sat there and took it. When Pansy kept pushing, as Draco knew she would, the boy's eyes started to glaze over.

Draco's eyes narrowed. He wasn't revealing anything. Pansy let up and started to see to him.

He realized she was pouring more and more cranberry sauce onto his plate.

"Will you stop?"

She looked up at him, adoration only barely concealed by the hurt she attempted to pass off.

"But I thought you *liked* cranberry sauce."

"Just ... not ... now."

Pansy began to whine even more, and Draco rolled his eyes at her.

"I was enjoying myself, Pansy."

"Why can't you just enjoy yourself with me?"

Draco smirked.

"Well, I would, but you see, Potter doesn't sleep, and he doesn't put up silencing charms, so I'd hate to please myself with your delectable thighs if I knew that he was probably being a perv and listening in."

Pansy giggled and clung to his arm with glee.

But Draco was confused. That should have put him over the edge. Pansy eventually went to what she had been talking about with Blaise. Draco leaned over to address Potter directly.

"You're not in Gryffindor anymore; we don't play to the same rules. But you seemed to have figured that out for yourself."

The boy sneered at him and went back to his own food.

When he thought it was enough time to allow himself a look at Harry, the boy was gone again.

\*\*

He was found on a bench in the courtyard.

"Get up."

Harry's study-fuzzed mind could barely register the voice, but it was clear as day.

Malfoy.

"Get up."

Harry carefully put a marker in his place and did as he was told.

Malfoy sneered.

"For God's sake, don't listen to me! You're *supposed* to fight."

Comebacks spiraled through Harry's mind, but none of them were appropriate and all were far too revealing. He closed his mouth.

"What do you think you saw this morning?"

Harry furrowed his brow.

What had happened this morning? Harry still couldn't remember all the details. Before he'd blacked out, he'd ...

Seen something Malfoy was trying to hide.

"Because if you think you know, you'll tell me exactly what you saw, and I can go ahead and assure you that you were assuming actions on me. In case you hadn't noticed, spying is not a laughing matter."

Harry nodded, but Malfoy's look was far too demanding for him.

"Oh ... uhm " Brilliant. He was stuttering. "Slytherins don't tend to laugh."

Slightly more charming, but utterly imbecilic.

"You think you're so clever," Malfoy said. "You act like you know what's going on, and sometimes you can't even manage that."

Perhaps silence was better than stupidity.

"You haven't really seen anything, you know that?" It was a question Harry wasn't meant to answer. "Everyone has to save your sorry ass, and now you're alone, you don't know what to do. How you will ever be a Slytherin, I don't know, but I don't think you even understand the gravity of your situation."

"Remind me, exactly, what I did to deserve this onslaught," Harry said.

Malfoy rolled his eyes.

"You were a ruddy fool, bursting in on me like that. Watching me. You're terribly obvious about all of it."

Pause.

"Oh. Okay."

Malfoy turned away, shaking his head. Just when Harry was about to go back to his book, Malfoy spun around and hit him square in the nose.

Harry hadn't been hit like that in years. He reeled backwards and over the bench, clutching at his nose. Next came a kick to his knee, a scream piercing him as much as the boot.

"Why don't you do anything?" Malfoy screamed. "Why do you just lay there? You're pathetic!"

Filthy, burning rage.

Blood rushed to his head and poured out his nose, and Harry ran at him, fists flailing dizzily as he landed square on the other boy's chest.

Heavy panic, the sound of flesh against flesh dealt in violent release did nothing to calm him, but spurred him on. Screaming rage scratched at his throat, pent-up emotions firing and spitting all to land on Malfoy.

Red against pale, the yellow of the stone disturbingly blended with Malfoy's skin, his robes and blood the only smattering of life left in the scene beneath Harry. The green of the badge matched the green of the grass Malfoy's head had just hit.

At least Harry hadn't killed him.

One sob was all. It could be mistaken for a sigh.

Harry rolled off Malfoy.

Malfoy pushed himself up and glared at Harry.

"Are you done?"

Harry nodded.

"You should forget this conversation. This ... brawl."

Another nod.

Malfoy left him.

Harry's book had not even turned a page.

## Chapter Three: Renaissance

*Chapter 3 of 6*

Harry starts to relax into his new house, and Dumbledore makes an interesting announcement.

*Chapter Three:*

*Renaissance*

Harry woke up early the next morning feeling more alive than he had in a long time.

The silken sheets brushed against his skin, and he could feel the fuzziness of sleep leaving the edges of his mind. He hummed as his fingers and toes tingled, not really awake and not really asleep.

The heavy green drapes concealed him, a great shield hung around his bed as Harry remembered the dream that he had had last night.

Harry gasped as he felt his erection, still there, bulging inside his boxers. He moved his hips slowly against the fabric, his body remembering the feelings of his dream last night. He gasped at the friction his cotton boxers created against the swollen skin, and he moved his hips some more, desperately.

Harry tried to remember where he was; this was his third night in Slytherin, he was surrounded by sleeping boys, and oh god, he had the tightest erection imaginable. There was no way in hell he could just ignore this until the showers, he thought desperately as he rolled again, feeling woozy. His head buzzed as he let one of his hands fall off the bed. It hung there, suspended, and Harry knew this was what it felt like to be drunk. He smiled lazily, this one perfect moment to be remembered forever; a light in dark times.

A hand snaked down and started to stroke his erection, slowly trailing over the head and playing with the slit. A hiss sounded from between teeth, lips pillowing out between them and toes starting to curl on the sheets.

His lip was starting to bleed, surely, but how could he possibly care now when this felt so good? His eyes fluttered shut. He didn't want to see the darkness of the room now, so different and so cold, so strange.

When he started to move, all consciousness ran from him, like so many butterflies in a field of poppies.

Who cared where he was? He could do this anywhere that he could trust he was alone, and he could relish the feeling of a hand moving over his painful erection and his hips starting to slowly buck into it.

He could almost feel the tickle of someone else's hair on his bare chest, fingers on his nipples. They were wet, and they left him feeling cold and wanting more.

Harry gasped as his fantasy started to take on elements from the dream he'd been having, and his body wound up tight like a drum. His knees rose off the bed and lolled over to one side, winding him up. This ghost left to haunt the waking realm of his life was controlling him, bending him to his will as it bit him on the side of the neck.

Harry almost forgot that when he looked in the bathroom mirror he wouldn't find bruises sprouting there.

Oh, but this lover was cruel.

Speeding up and slowing down as Harry could feel himself coming closer and closer to the edge, letting him hover just over the brink of it, and then bringing him back, drawing him out, making him want to moan out loud with long unrequited desire.

Harry twisted on the bed, his throat letting out a strangled cry, and he almost felt like he was being raped by his dream lover. Raped by someone he didn't know, and goddamn this rape felt so fucking good.

Could it really be rape if he wanted to scream down the walls?

Harry bit his pillow, drooling blood onto the sheets from where he'd bitten through his own lip. How could that be the only mark of this passion? It was an amazing punishment; his psyche was cruel. He would only be left wanting, and soon that wanting turned into need, and that need turned into action, and still he wanted so much more, knowing that he was cheating himself of something exquisite and *oh god* his hips were bucking against his hand.

The feelings were overpowering.

Wanting those fingers on his frenzied cock not to be his own, but someone else's.

Someone powerful.

Harry twisted painfully in the bed, his eyes popping open at the passion and then slamming shut at the shame.

Wanting for their touch to actually be there. Someone passionate.

He could almost feel his imaginary lover biting his shoulder, tearing at his stomach, ripping at his eyes.

Someone dark.

Harry saw stars as he came into his hand, the sticky mess of his dream spilling over his pants and reaching his bare stomach, staining the perfect sheets in this perfect bed.

Alive.

\*\*

When Harry looked at himself in the mirror, he noticed that his black eye from last night was swelling badly. Spitting his toothpaste into the sink and wiping his mouth, he admired it.

Somehow, it didn't really look that bad.

He smiled at himself and felt the skin crinkle together painfully. Doubtful that he'd be able to go to Madame Pomfrey without her asking questions, he figured he should wait it out until the swelling went down.

A concealment charm should do the trick; no one would have to know. Harry carefully cast the charm on himself and left the washroom.

Malfoy was casting a similar charm, and Harry couldn't help but smile.

\*\*

Harry hadn't realized how delicious green tea was until that very morning. It tasted like dirt, and the summer air, and the deep wooded places of the Forbidden Forest.

Of course, he didn't really know what these things tasted like, but he had a good idea, and he just knew that they must have tasted something like green tea.

He couldn't get enough of it.

Malfoy was staring at him again.

Such a pity it was, to not be able to meet a simple glare with one just as fierce. Distance had never really shown him how much those eyes reminded him of a cave; he'd always dimly associated them with hate, but their deep gray color reminded him of frozen ice over a great rock in the lake in the wintertime. They weren't very clear, but they had a million different shapes floating in them all at once and they were enough to make Harry confused over whether to look away or keep looking for eternity.

He'd never realized how much Blaise Zabini's skin reminded him of chocolate.

The owls were hooting noisily as they delivered mail, and Harry could almost hear the power they held in their wings, the absolute freedom and at the same time their absolute slavery. Harry pitied Hedwig. He hoped she didn't resent him too much.

Professor Snape's eyes were pure black like his robes, only they didn't move as much, and Harry wondered if he had accidentally gotten ink in his eyes so many times that it stained them black permanently. Or perhaps, he mused, if they weren't made up of very large pupils with no irises.

Harry wondered if that was even possible.

His plain scrambled eggs were disgusting; they were just there, rubbery, yellow, and still perfectly done.

Harry decided to go outside. It was a Sunday, and everyone was relaxing. Except possibly Pansy Parkinson, who was worrying over Malfoy.

Harry grabbed his bag. This was so surreal; he was carrying nearly as many books this year as he and Ron had teased Hermione for carrying. They had been so stupid, Hermione so smart.

Outside, fresh air, wonderful. Bloody brilliant Sunday.

\*\*

He should have been exhausted. But honestly, he wasn't. He wanted to do some more research.

Where Harry's strange new surge of energy had come from, he had no idea, but he was definitely interested in finding out if he was on the right track, and he definitely knew that he should have crashed by now.

*Mind magic ...*

Occlumency had suddenly gotten so much more interesting than it had been last year; Legilimency even more so. So, while he should have been writing up his project for his independent study, he was searching through Hogwarts' mind magic section.

*Barriers; the Psychology of Mind Magic*

This looked interesting.

*... The problem that most wizards have with mind magic is not that they are unable to perform it, it is that they don't have the focus and don't know how to go about opening certain parts of their minds and closing others.*

*Mind Magic is very unique in that it holds a very different psychology than a lot of other magics. One must know themselves, inside and out, and have accepted their weaknesses and strengths. They haven't delved into the corners of their mind that may very well be used against them; in essence, they don't know what they need to protect. This causes many problems for them, great and small. If they don't want someone to know a certain habit in their thought, but are not quite sure what it is or how deeply it resides in the brain, it is much easier for someone to crack their code.*

Harry read for a while, but the Freudian speak turned indecipherable the later the night became. He didn't know enough about what the woman was writing about; he'd never studied psychology, and therefore couldn't grasp exactly what the woman was talking about.

He gathered his books, Madame Pince watching him carefully from her position at the main desk of the office. He fished her a bare minimum of polite recognition; a tight-lipped almost-grin.

The castle was damp after nightfall. The dungeons would always carry a certain gloom about them. It was one of the few Muggle stereotypes that had actually turned out to hold some truth. *Dungeons are most always going to be cold and extremely dark.*

Harry passed a group of giggling Ravenclaw girls. He thought they may have been fourth years.

Had it really been that long ago since he was an underclassman? Somewhere he must have lost track of the time. After last year, his beginning years at Hogwarts seemed foolish. Whenever he remembered something he had said or done, he would have to also stop and wonder why. It wasn't as though he had lived in a bubble for most of his Hogwarts career, simply that sometimes he could have been more cautious.

More cautious, more stealthy, more *careful*.

He reached the Slytherin common room and uttered the password.

Not one close-knit group of students looked up from their work as he made his way to his dorm.

\*\*

Blaise bent over his textbook in the common room. He tried to ignore Pansy's demanding, annoying voice asking where Draco was. He attempted to sink into his chair, undetected. Crabbe and Goyle weren't giving her any help. *Oh, honestly*, Blaise thought to himself. *She could at least ask someone with an IQ over 100.*

The chair next to him was suddenly occupied.

"Do you know where he is?"

Blaise didn't take his eyes off his homework.

"No."

"Hmph," Pansy snorted. Her voice was too high for it to be effective.

It probably would have been best for him to indulge her in whatever it was she wanted to say, so he decided against his strong urge to ignore her.

"Why do you need him so badly?"

"Because I hear he's in contact with his father, and I need to talk to Lucius."

This was not something he could ignore.

"Pansy?" Blaise asked, setting down his quill and looking tentatively at her.

"My mum won't listen to me, but maybe she'll listen to him."

"Pansy, I don't think this is a very good idea," he lowered his voice considerably, the publicity of the Common Room not escaping him. "Perhaps there's reasoning behind the madness. You have always deeply respected your mother, as have I, but..."

"Oh, what would you know about it? Your mother is almost as much a whore as Potter's was!" Pansy snapped, melodramatic and extremely aggravating.

"Don't talk about my mum that way," Blaise's voice was dangerously low, his eyes a dark fire slowly burning.

"If you don't want me to argue, don't disagree with me," she said matter-of-factly, her singsong at it's most annoying. She stood up just as Potter walked into the room.

"Oi! Have you seen Draco?"

Potter blinked, confused, and shook his head.

Pansy stormed from the room, determination set on her face and ferocity in her step.

Blaise watched Potter go back to their dorm, not really seeing him.

The drama between Draco and Pansy had already started, and it wasn't even the second week of school. Honestly, they'd been at Hogwarts for three days. He had a strong suspicion that he and Draco weren't going to have much time alone this year.

And it wasn't even as though the same old drama didn't get recycled every year. Both Pansy and Draco had a tendency to hold lasting grudges. Forgiveness was sparing.

Pansy would make a very good Malfoy someday.

\*\*

School again. There wasn't time for this. Draco had grown up in a very rich, very old wizarding family. Magic should have been a simple instinct for him. But of course it wasn't, and of course that meant he was spending very valuable time with the Vulture in Transfiguration, copying down sheet upon sheet of notes.

He could hear the squeaking of Potter's trainer as he bounced his leg underneath his desk. Draco didn't have the patience for this.

On top of that, he was far too sick of asking Potter to stop to go down that road again.

He tried to concentrate on his formula instead.

Would magic really be any easier now that he knew all of these different complications? He doubted it. In fact, sometimes he thought it only made things more complicated than they needed to be.

When he had been a boy, he had been able to do magic so openly and freely that he had somehow learned to control the outbursts. When he had an outburst, where he had one, and they did what he wanted them to do. He'd always been a very willful child; something his father didn't particularly encourage.

Draco's eyes darkened, malevolence thinly veiled behind them. His father would approve of his pulling in front of the Mudblood in Transfiguration.

Perhaps complicated magic formulae were not so terrible.

\*\*

Harry's good mood was doomed to a rather unpleasant end. Harry had awoken the first Monday of the school year with a determination to ignore his House, but when his morning paper was delivered, he could not ignore the front page story:

*Morrigan Clan Found Slaughtered in Ireland*

*The last remnants of Ireland's fabled Morrigan clan were found slaughtered in their beds early this morning.*

*The Morrigan, who were fabled as being the closest to royalty an Irish clan could be, haven't lost their prestige or their mystery. Within the last century, they have become almost entirely reclusive. There haven't been any public records made since 1921, when the last to attend Hogwarts graduated.*

*The murders have only increased their infamy.*

*"There are many reasons why they may have been murdered," says Irish representative John McCarvey, "theft, bribery, we really suspected them in any crime."*

*McCarvey reassures the press that while the autopsies reveal very similar results to those performed under the Dark Mark, it is not in fact a Death Eater attack.*

*The bodies were missing eyes, ears, and in a mad attempt at humiliation, have been castrated. When they were finally found, the corpses were predicted to be four days old. It has been fifteen years since such a brutal massacre has occurred, the last being Peter Pettigrew.*

Harry couldn't read any more. He gagged, the smells of a cheery morning breakfast too ironic. The Slytherins around him were quiet. The rest of the hall muttered to one another.

Automatically, Harry turned his head to see how Malfoy was taking this.

Composure and easy breathing stood against a backdrop of shock as the other boy sipped his tea. What if he had known all along? What if Malfoy was in communication with his father in Azkaban, and what would happen if Lucius escaped?

A letter landed in Malfoy's plate, and he scrunched his nose in disapproval.

What if this very instant, as Malfoy scanned his letter, he was reading about a dark wizard's triumph?

With a slamming jolt, Harry realized that any attempt at what he had once thought was normal was now futile. He was caught in the middle of a group of people he knew he couldn't trust, and knew didn't like him. They would not lament his death, if it were to come quickly. Some would most likely celebrate.

Here was Harry Potter, stuck on an island made of guilt, fear, suspicion, and enemies. Lost to an eternal battle that he would not win, not as long as things stayed as they were.

Because before he had kept his head above water with the help of his friends in Gryffindor Tower, and here there was no one to hold him up. Even the people who were not blatant enemies would sooner let him be cut down than saved. He was not a damsel in distress, and he had no sympathy.

Harry glanced at Malfoy again.

He was calmly sitting and eating his breakfast a few seats away from him, features schooled into indifference.

*If we made a truce, then perhaps I could get somewhere.*

The thought was fleeting and embarrassing, but somewhere Harry knew to follow his instincts. The Malfoys were up to something; that much had been clear to him since he had started this year in the dormitories. What it was, he couldn't know. He had deeply hated the entire family for years, and now he would fight tooth and nail before he let this happen. He could not be sympathizing with them! He refused.

How had he even managed to find himself in this mess in the first place? One moment, he was simply expecting a new, darker year in Gryffindor Tower, the next he was left to this isolated existence in Slytherin. How had he made the remarkable transformation from the brave, never-shirking-righteousness Gryffindor to the sneaky, overachieving, manipulative Slytherin?

There was not one clue to the mystery. Had it happened so gradually that he hadn't even noticed it? Had anyone noticed it, for that matter?

He had no idea.

But he had to know. He had to know before he found himself murdering Malfoy. He had to turn this dangerous problem into a winning situation.

The Sorting Hat had put him in Slytherin for a reason, and that reason had to be surfacing. He knew it could have been a mistake, or vindictive pleasure, but somehow Harry doubted that a centuries-old magical device could make mistakes anymore. Or that it wanted someone to suffer. Not now. Not after all that it had seen.

He would watch Malfoy. He would watch, and maybe he would learn something deadly important.

\*\*

"What's that, Draco?" Pansy asked, looking over Draco's shoulder. He brushed her off.

"Just a letter from mother. Pretty mindless reading."

He regretted the words as soon as they left his lips.

"A letter? From your mother?" Pansy's eyes lit like a thousand torches. "What's she talking about?"

Draco rolled his eyes, trying to shrug off Pansy's interest.

"Apparently her last dinner party went poorly. Something about not having any light conversation starters."

"That's a shame."

She wasn't fooled by him in the slightest.



"Now, if you don't mind, I'm off to class. Can't get to Potions too early."

Murmurs spread along the Great Hall, glaring eyes glinting against the Slytheins. They were the only table not entirely surprised by the recent attacks. Honestly, Death Eater impersonators were bound to turn up sooner or later. Apparently, they had decided upon sooner rather than later.

It is a very dishonorable thing, to steal someone else's glory. Very cowardly as well. Malfoys know this, and are never involved in this sort of thing. Malfoys aren't cowards; they may look out for themselves, but they won't hide behind someone else's actions to conceal their own involvement. It wasn't done, and it was hardly appropriate.

What people didn't understand was that this kind of thing takes its root in shame over one's own actions. And Malfoys are never ashamed.

\*\*

If it wasn't the news of an attack, it was news on the different law cases that had turned up. Harry found that once the Daily Prophet had stopped lying, it became a much more interesting read.

Gripping, really.

Perhaps now that there really was something important to read about, and something that Harry suspected would make the Muggle bestseller lists, people realized how important the paper really was. The war made everything seem that much more important.

Little things, like where your friends were, who you were with, how many flavors of ice cream you tried, how many people you blew off. With a deathly possibility of never being able to do anything, suddenly everyone wanted to do everything.

According to rumor, a pair of seventh year Hufflepuffs had eloped overnight. They'd only been dating for two years.

Harry had watched a first year Slytherin dive into the lake and let himself sink. When Hagrid had gotten him out, the boy said it sounded like the best way to go.

The first year Slytherins had separated themselves from the rest of the House. No one stopped them. Harry thought that maybe they were too afraid of making the wrong connections.

Harry had started watching Draco Malfoy so closely that he had figured out his favorite dessert and could almost time his morning routine to the second.

It was under this intense suspicion that Dumbledore decided to make his rather unusual announcement.

"I am sorry to bother you during your dinner hour." There were a few scattered groans, and Harry imagined that Ron's voice was among them. "I know it is a very important matter; however, I must stress to you a very important Point of Grievance."

"A time of war has always been and will always be a time of suspicion, but heed my warning: there is no need to start a second war within Hogwarts' walls. We must, as a school, find a way to band together.

"The Ministry thinks that it would be a good idea for the school to not only find something to celebrate, but to also try to eradicate the many years, centuries even, of House Rivalry and come together in peace.

"So it gives me great pleasure to announce that this Halloween will be a celebration. We will hold a traditional masque." Here Dumbledore was cut off by a slew of whispers all around the Hall. Many Slytherins' eyes had just lit up with delight, and when Harry looked around the Hall, he noticed that several purebloods were whispering excitedly. Dumbledore himself looked as if he had figured this would happen and was waiting patiently on the dais, his eyes twinkling merrily.

"Halloween is on a Sunday this year, and on that day we will hold the grand Masquerade. No one is to come with another; you will all be masked or glamoured to hide your identities completely. No one will know to which House any other student belongs, and no one will reveal themselves. There is nothing like a little mystery to invigorate youth.

"Professors McGonagall and Flitwick will be teaching some basic glamour techniques, and I assure you that the local robe shop in Hogsmeade is ready for a slew of new orders for costumes."

Dumbledore smiled widely, and Harry could almost swear he heard a slight chuckle come from the older man, as he said his last words of the evening.

"Now, return to your meals, and remember that your neighbor is not your enemy."

## Chapter Four: Some Semblance of Normalcy

*Chapter 4 of 6*

Harry and Dumbledore have a much-needed discussion.

**Disclaimer:** I don't own these characters, JKR does. If I did, I probably wouldn't be posting this story here and making absolutely no money off of it ...

**Author's Note:** I haven't officially thanked my beta, **lady\_rhian**, for working with me. She's made this fic so much more fluent! Not to mention she's an incredibly talented author and I feel so privileged to be able to work with her so personally.

Thanks, lady\_rhian.

*Chapter Four:*

*Some Semblance of Normalcy*

"You aren't still waiting on Ron, are you?" Ginny asked Hermione conversationally as she bit into a chocolate.

Hermione made a face.

"Of course not."

"He's been such a prat lately," Ginny conceded.

Hermione bit into the bar of dark chocolate Ginny had given her. Perhaps this summer she would've waited for Ron, back before everything had fallen apart with Harry. She just couldn't understand it. Never had she seen any sort of Slytherin quality of Harry's ... he had seemed so much the opposite of all that. Apparently, the Hat had seen differently.

Still, she missed him. He may be a Slytherin now, but Hermione knew better than to let it affect a friendship so strong as theirs.

"I'd rather go with Harry."

"Really?" Ginny's eyes widened in surprise.

"He's at least trying," Hermione sighed. Ginny leaned closer, a concerned look on her face as she took hold of Hermione's hand.

"How is he trying?"

"Well, he still talks to me. And I think he's adjusting, but I can't know for sure. Unlike Ron, who just glares at him and refuses to talk to him."

"Mum says dad owed him, and he had been pretty down, but not that bad."

Hermione leaned back against Ginny's bed. They were surrounded by empty butterbeer bottles, sweet wrappers, and old pictures. Ginny hadn't even had to bully Colin Creevey into giving them up; he just smiled and let her have them. Hermione hadn't realized how many he had taken over the years. She picked up one of the older pictures. She, Ron, and Harry had all been studying by the lake.

She felt tears coming to her eyes. Harry and Ron were trying (and failing) to discreetly avoid her and her work schedule. A golden chain around her neck glinted in the sunlight. It must have been in their third year; she never wore necklaces, and that must have been her Time-Turner. Ron and Harry were having a play fight over one of Harry's quills; the picture Hermione snapped at them.

"Have you ever thought of owling him?" Ginny asked, gently pulling her from her reverie.

"Yes, actually. I think I'll do that tomorrow."

"I might send him something, too. As much as I'm over him, I still miss him."

Hermione doubted that Ginny was truly over him, but she knew that those two would never work. Harry was too moody to be with someone like Ginny, and besides, he'd never shown any interest in girls. Well, except for Cho Chang, and that had been pretty half-hearted. She was starting to wonder if he might be mostly gay, but then again, he had a lot to focus on right now. No time for a girlfriend.

"Do you think that Harry might be gay?"

"Do *you*?"

"I have my suspicions."

"Well, he could be. He's a bit of an asexual, from what I can tell." Ginny was carefully peeling the wrapper off a lollipop.

"It would make sense to me. Why do you think he'd hide it if he were?"

Ginny gave her a look.

"Do you think the Dursleys trained him to be open? He's a Slytherin now, after all. Maybe he's hiding it because it might be important later. Who knows?"

"I'm not even sure about it, so please don't tell anybody, okay, Ginny?" Hermione asked, just to make sure their discussion wouldn't get out. "He's in a bad position with things already."

"Of course not. This is Girl Talk. Anything we say now is immediately confidential."

"Like the fact that you and Dean are starting the nasty this weekend?"

Ginny sat back and mused.

"Hopefully. If all goes according to plan. We're hoping to go on this romantic date, anniversary and all, and I'm starting to think it's about that time."

Hermione shook her head.

"You're starting to sound like me. Sometimes, you just can't plan things."

"And you're starting to sound like me."

The two girls giggled a bit.

Hermione glanced at her watch.

"I've got to go study before bed. I'll see you later."

"Yeah. Goodnight, Hermione." Ginny smiled and waved as she started to pick up her trash.

"Night Ginny."

\*\*

"Wake up, Harry."

A motherly voice called to him, sounding his name from the distance. He didn't want to wake up.

"There's someone here to see you; I think you'll like him."

"Who is it?" Harry asked, stretching out his arms to search for the person in this darkness.

"You have to open your eyes to know, silly."

*Harry slowly opened his eyes, a petulant child reluctant to wake up.*

*"Mum! I can't see!"*

*Harry felt a comforting hand on his shoulder, and looked up into impossibly green eyes. A man appeared out of the darkness.*

*"Hello, Harry."*

*His long black hair looked as though he'd actually washed and brushed it for once, eyes no longer hollow but sparkling with something exuberant.*

*"Sirius!"*

*The Child Harry ran to him, arms wide and giggles escaping his mouth. But as he nearly collided with his godfather, strong hands came down and held him in place.*

*"Harry. Don't make this harder than it is," Sirius said, voice strained with distress.*

*"What?"*

*"I came here to warn you, not to make you forget what is happening upstairs."*

*"But ... but ..."*

*"You must forget me. But if you become too attached to this, you won't be able to carry on living."*

*"But, Sirius "*

*"Don't live in your dreams, Harry."*

*Harry leveled his gaze, and suddenly, he was staring straight into Sirius' black eyes.*

*"You mustn't keep yourself locked away. Grieve if you must, but know you are in danger, and I don't want or need the honor of your tears. Keep your wits, and forget me."*

*Cruelly, Sirius disappeared, a mad cackling separating them as Harry felt his throat being screamed raw, his arms clawing for some hold on the man that Sirius had denied him, and the metallic taste of blood in his mouth was enough to wake him.*

*Harry coughed several times, blood dripping from his mouth. His curtains rustled, and his throat was wracked with an angry cough. Harry collapsed onto his pillows as he saw Blaise Zabini's curious face peering around the curtain.*

*"Bad cough," Harry rasped, turning his head to confront the Slytherin.*

*Blaise nodded, narrowing his eyes in suspicion.*

*"Pleasant dreams, then."*

*Harry nodded, unable to speak.*

*As Blaise padded over to his wardrobe and opened it for pajamas, Harry pulled the curtains tightly around his bed and cast his first silencing charm on it.*

*\*\**

*Dear Harry,*

*It feels like ages since I've talked to you. Things have been so busy lately, what with our NEWTs coming up. I hardly get to talk to people in Gryffindor these days, let alone you.*

*You're so far away. I don't know what you're feeling, or how you are, or anything about this whole thing. I hate it! You're too far away, and there's too much to catch up on.*

*Is there anything interesting going on in Slytherin? I know that you were concerned about Malfoy this summer, and I'm sure you're watching him closely now. I wish we could talk face to face, I don't even know where to begin with this letter.*

*Is there any way that we may be able to talk in person some time soon?*

*~Hermione*

*\*\**

*Dear Harry,*

*Hermione and I were talking last night, and we both miss you very much.*

*You've always been such a part of my life that it's weird not to have you here anymore. Ron's changed so much without you. Like some sort of kicked puppy. Have you tried talking to him recently? Maybe that would help things.*

*Quidditch is weird without you too. I know it's been so long since you played with the team, but we all thought you were going to be back with us again this year. I miss playing Chaser; I know I'm not half as good as you at Seeker.*

*Ron's looking over my shoulder. Honestly, if he wants to talk to you, he should just catch you in the halls sometime and do it.*

*~Ginny*

*\*\**

*Harry Potter,*

*You are cordially invited to a small get-together of students wishing to celebrate the start of term. We can meet, talk in person, and find out much more about each other than we have before!*

*Everyone is looking forward to seeing you; you're the mystery of the year. I have a feeling that you'll be quite in vogue, once the scandal has worn off. Don't be discouraged.*

*The party will convene in the Potions classroom next Thursday at nine o'clock. Don't be late!*

*~Professor Slughorn*

\*\*

"Mr. Potter?" Snape stood in the door to Harry's Transfiguration class. Harry looked up.

"You are wanted in the Headmaster's office."

Snape didn't stick around to show him the way.

Professor McGonagall nodded her head, indicated for Harry to collect his things, and turned to finish writing the notes on the board. Harry packed his things quickly, trying to ignore the whispers from his classmates.

Harry had completely forgotten about Dumbledore's meetings with him this year. Had he thought about it, he probably would have figured that Dumbledore would have given up ...

Or maybe this wasn't even about that. Maybe he'd done something ... Had Dumbledore somehow found out about his late night wandering? Would he be terribly upset? It must be something important for his class to be interrupted.

Harry's footsteps rang in his ears. He couldn't help but pick up the pace. Whatever it was, he'd have to be ready. He tried to remember everything he could have possibly done to upset his Headmaster, any rules he might have broken. Other than the wandering, he drew a blank.

Then a much worse thought occurred to him.

Harry stopped dead in his tracks, a feeling of dread washing over him and settling like an ice-cold lake into his stomach.

What if something even worse had happened? What if there had been a murder, or there were plans for the Death Eaters to take over the Ministry? What if Dumbledore was dying a slow and painful death and had to get him all the help he could? What if he was being pulled out of school and taking full-time classes from the Headmaster?

The stone statue that guarded the office was swept aside as soon as Harry came into view of it. *Oh god*, Harry thought, trying desperately to slow down, but he couldn't, and he found himself sprinting up the steps, his trainers smacking them as he tried to get there as quickly as possible ...

"Harry, it's good to see you again."

That voice was normal.

One of Dumbledore's magical instruments was whirring genially in a corner. He smiled at Harry, who heard the statue grind back into place at the bottom of the steps. Harry quickly attempted to smooth his rather flustered appearance.

"There is no need to be so worried; you are not here to receive any sort of punishment."

Harry closed his mouth, trying not to seem as confused as he really was.

"Do you like Earl Grey? Because I feel rather in the mood for it myself." Harry nodded, a bit dumbfounded. "Have a seat."

Harry quickly pulled out a chair and sat down. Dumbledore set to work conjuring a teapot.

"Professor?" Harry asked, after a pause.

"Yes?"

Dumbledore handed him a steaming cup.

"You're not angry?"

Dumbledore's eyes took an indescribable look.

"I am not angry with you, but I am severely disappointed in myself."

Harry sipped his tea, allowing it to slow his heart. It was scalding hot, but he really didn't mind. *He isn't angry.*

"I apologize for the temperature; I must say that I always have it warm. Keeps an old man alive, it does." He smiled cheekily, and Harry couldn't help but notice that the hand that was offering the teacup was burned black.

"Oh, no, I enjoy it."

Dumbledore twinkled at him, and Harry could do nothing but hide himself behind his teacup.

"Professor, if you don't mind my asking "

"What the news has been lately?" Harry furrowed his brow. That had not been what he was going to ask, but an important question.

"Absolutely nothing. Though Professor Snape is climbing within the Death Eater ranks, he still is not privy to Voldemort's plans. It appears that he is waiting to make a large attack, but does not know where it would be best to strike at the moment."

"Oh. Okay. Thank you."

Dumbledore took a long drink from his teacup, and Harry tried not to fidget in the old man's presence. Finally, the tea finished, and Harry, obviously not making a move to further the conversation, Dumbledore looked over his half-moon glasses and spoke.

"I should have listened to your needs last year. I am sorry that I did not respect or trust you enough to know what you needed from me, and I should not have kept information from you. Especially information so important."

Harry nodded, thinking he knew where this was going.

"When I dropped you off at the Weasley's home this summer, I told you that I would give you private lessons. Do you remember this?"

"Yes, Professor."

"That will not change. I cannot tell you when or how often they will be, but I will let you know in good time."

"Thank you, Professor."

The mug in Harry's hands felt heavy and warm.

"Now for the second reason I've called you up here."

Harry looked up at the old man, startled at the sudden change of topic.

"I have received the papers due for your independent study, and I could not be more supportive of your choice. Celtic magic will, inevitably, help you to understand Voldemort in a way you would never have dreamt of before."

"So you approve?"

"Yes, and I suggest you get started right away. There is no time to waste."

"When do you want my first research paper?"

"The Friday after the Masquerade. You will be interested to know that the Masquerade is actually one part of an ancient ritual; rather, that it's the newest part. Samhain is the ritual the Celts and other ancient, pagan wizards used to welcome the New Year and burn the tragedies of the previous year. It will come at a prudent time for you, I find, and so I would like Samhain to be your first research paper." Dumbledore looked at Harry, his fingers steeped on the desk and his eyes piercing Harry's. After a moment, he started to dig around in one of the drawers on his desk.

"What are you looking for?" Harry asked, leaning forward slightly to try and see the contents of one of Dumbledore's drawers.

"Your Independent Study file. Ah yes! Here it is!" Dumbledore pulled out a violently purple file folder with Harry's name on it and took out a stack of paper. He handed it to Harry, who recognized his own handwriting.

"This copy is for you to keep. And I think it would be best if your research papers were handed directly to me; we will have to forgo another teacher's interference in this instance."

Harry looked through the folder and found that Dumbledore had added some things to it. He realized it would be rude to search through everything, so he pointedly closed the file and let it rest in his lap. He tried not to fidget. So many new things had been introduced to him at once, he was having trouble keeping up. He shouldn't lose focus. He had to learn to think on his feet, and so he tried to remember what it was that he really needed to ask. There was one question he simply had to ask ...

"Professor Dumbledore?"

Dumbledore put his master file away and looked directly at Harry.

"Why did you decide to re-sort us this year?"

Dumbledore thought for a moment.

"Truth be told, it wasn't my idea. The Ministry thought it best that Hogwarts return to some of its old ways. Last years' OWL scores weren't quite in rank with those from Beauxbatons and Durmstrang, and the Ministry thought that maybe it was because of a deviation from original Hogwarts tradition. One must understand that at one point Hogwarts had been the leader in magical education in Europe. They thought it would be best to resurrect part of our history, and in doing so, return to our old standards. At least in theory."

"And you agreed?"

"During such suspicious times as these, we need all the unity and trust we can get. Re-sorting can help lead to that. And I had a feeling that some people had been incorrectly sorted in the first place."

Dumbledore inspected Harry over the rims of his glasses. Harry tried once again not to fidget.

"But you must know it's only brought up more bad feeling."

"For the time, yes, perhaps it has. The students of Hogwarts have learned to associate themselves with their Houses, and have only allowed themselves to grow in line with the attributes of their House. You were, as you so often are, an exception to this trend," Dumbledore explained, leaning forward on his desk. "But you must remember, you are not the only exception. Zacharias Smith was also resorted into Slytherin, and Padma Patil into Gryffindor. There are several other students who have had to make the same adjustment as you have, but yours is an exceptionally intriguing case."

Harry nodded, but his brows furrowed in confusion.

"But why me? I'm just as much a Gryffindor, probably more of a Gryffindor, than I am a Slytherin," he said, trying desperately not to sound whiny.

"You are growing away from your old habits; it is not unlikely that you will find yourself becoming more ambitious and cunning. Slytherin can help you with this. What were the Hat's words when it first sorted you so many years ago?"

Harry thought for a moment.

*"And Slytherin will help you on the way to greatness ..."*

"Yes. Very interesting words, those. Surely there must be something positive with your rapid switch of atmosphere."

"I suppose," Harry muttered grudgingly, and Dumbledore chuckled.

"I'll help you." He leaned back in his chair once more. "They do keep you on your toes, don't they?"

"Yes, I suppose they do ..."

"And they are giving you valuable insight into your enemies. Perhaps you will be able to make some allies in Slytherin."

"Allies, sir?"

"Not all Slytherins are evil," Dumbledore stated, a playful twinkle lighting his eyes. "You are a prime example."

Harry brooded, staring into the dregs of his tea.

"Slytherin will help you in ways you cannot possibly know now. But you must first ~~bl~~ow it to help you; don't fight new ways of life simply because you were more comfortable in Gryffindor."

"I'll try not to."

"Good boy. Now, would you like another cup? Because I certainly would."

The old man looked down at his teapot, but noticed his wristwatch in the middle of preparing the tea things.

"My goodness, look at the time!" Dumbledore exclaimed. "If you hurry, you may just catch your last class of the day. Thank you for indulging an old man, and hurry out of here!"

\*\*

Harry had been able to catch Charms, and Flitwick had nearly fallen off his podium for shock. He spent the hour practicing silent charm-casting on his quill. When the class finally ended, Hermione smiled at him.

Immediately upon pushing into the Slytherin Common Room, Crabbe looked up at him.

"So what did Dumblebum tell you, Potter? That you make the worst Slytherin in Hogwarts?"

Harry rolled his eyes.

"I'm surprised by your sudden wit, Crabbe. I'll have to put that line in my journal. 'Note to Self: Today has not been a total waste, for I have finally gotten Crabbe to speak in complete sentences.'"

Crabbe swallowed and glared stupidly at Harry.

"Well ... sod off!"

Harry sighed loudly and trudged up to his dorm. He slammed the door behind him and threw his bag onto his bed. He grabbed his broom and decided to go for a quick fly. He took off his outer robe and left it on the bed. Completely ignoring Crabbe and Goyle as he walked back through the Common Room, Harry headed off to the pitch.

He was met with many odd stares as he made his way out, but could hardly be brought to care. At least these stares did not warrant a response; had the curious stares and giggling girls from the train ride to Hogwarts returned, he would have been much more annoyed. As it was, Harry didn't really feel he had to deal with any of these people.

When Harry finally reached the pitch, he burst into the air, letting the wind whip his hair out of his face. He recklessly went through his Seeker's warm ups, diving and tumbling and rolling without restraint. On the western end of the pitch, a group of third years were playing three-on-three; Harry took care to avoid them. He soared up above the pitch, about where he normally stayed during matches, and breathed in the thin air.

God, it had been too long since he'd flown. Really, it had only been about two and a half weeks since he and Ron and Ginny had run practice games. He tried not to think of it. He was supposed to be relaxing.

Harry didn't know how long he flew. It felt like forever, and he finally left the pitch when the light was fading away. When Harry stumbled into the Slytherin shower rooms, he saw the Slytherin Quidditch team assembling in the locker rooms. Harry diverted into the shower, turned on some warm water, and started to rinse the sweat off of his body.

"Well, if it isn't Potty. Good on you for showering, by the way, your Gryffindor smell is starting to make the dorm difficult to sleep in."

"What? Just too damn good, is it, Malfoy? I'll make a point to sneak into the Gryffindor shower rooms after flying from now on."

Harry smirked as Crabbe made a strangled noise and hit Malfoy's left arm. Malfoy shot him a nasty glare before hoisting his Nimbus 2002 over his shoulder and leaving the changing rooms. Just before he walked out the door, he turned back to Harry.

"And you can forget training yourself in as a Chaser; you'll never play for my team."

Malfoy then left and took off into the air.

Harry took note of the glare he'd shot Crabbe for hitting his arm. His left arm.

## Chapter Five: Memories and Past Revealed

*Chapter 5 of 6*

Harry has his first lesson with Dumbledore, and several very disturbing events take place.

**Special disclaimer:** For the artistic purposes of this chapter, I used several direct quotes from J.K. Rowling's "Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince." They are taken mostly from the chapter entitled "The House of Gaunt." The page numbers of this chapter are 194-216, but I have by no means quoted everything. I have no intention of profiting from the use of these words, and no copyright infringement was intended.

**Author's Note:** Okay! One more chapter and then "Seas of Green" will be completely set up on this archive! Or, at least up until the point I'm at on all of the other sites. Hopefully chapter seven will be edited/posted soon, but I'm making no guarantees at this point.

*Chapter Five:*

*Memories and Past Revealed*

"A note for Mr. Harry Potter."

Harry swallowed some juice and stared down at the first year girl wearing Slytherin robes. She shifted from foot to foot, gaze wandering over the other younger years at the table, who were pretending not to watch.

"Thank you," Harry mumbled.

She gave him one wary glance as he took the note from her.

*Dear Harry,*

*Please meet me to discuss your Independent project at 8 pm this Saturday. I will be in my office.*

*Yours sincerely,*

*Albus Dumbledore*

*PS I favor Acid Pops.*

Harry folded the note and tucked it into his robes. He looked up out of the corner of his eye to check if anyone was watching him. His spine shivered once with that feeling of eyes on his back. He tried to pretend that nothing was extraordinary.

The owls had already swooped down, and Harry didn't expect to get anything else this morning. The Weasleys, Ginny, and Hermione were his only correspondents these days, and he should have already gotten a letter if he was going to. In fact, he hadn't heard from Mr. and Mrs. Weasley since that first Saturday, and now it had nearly been two weeks ago. He thought about writing them later.

"But Draco, *why* won't you tell me what it says?"

Pansy's shrill tone cut through Harry's concentration.

"Because it's none of your business, and besides, you're annoying me," Malfoy said, attempting to butter his toast while wrestling himself from her grasp.

"But Draco," her voice dropped and lost its shrill quality, "I saw who wrote it. It sounds important, and I think it's definitely something you should tell your future wife."

"And can't a father write his son without the Spanish Inquisition banging down the door?" he hissed at her.

Harry stirred the milk into his coffee, wondering if Malfoy knew he could hear him.

"I-I'm sorry, Draco, I didn't realize it meant that much to you."

Harry admired how clear her voice could sound when she was obviously upset.

When Blaise nudged his way into her seat, and Pansy snorted indignantly, Harry knew he'd heard all he would this morning.

He grabbed his bookbag and slung it over his shoulder quickly standing up. He narrowly avoided what could have been a rather painful blow to his ribs as Pansy's elbow flailed dangerously near them. Pansy shoved her way into his chair, shooting him a quick glare. Harry plastered a smirk across his face, his heart racing.

"Morning to you too, Parkinson."

She looked at him as though he'd grown a new head, but gradually a curious look stole into her eyes.

"Morning ... Potter."

Harry allowed himself to laugh as he walked away.

\*\*

The rest of the week went by quickly. The Slytherins kept Harry on his toes, which he was starting to become grateful for. Thursday morning, a vicious seventh year attacked him from behind with a Bat Bogey Hex. Harry had been able to deflect it without thinking. Draco Malfoy had laughed maliciously, and Blaise had gone to help the poor boy fix himself.

When Harry talked to Hermione in Transfiguration, Blaise had spoken to him as he passed.

"You could have made my job easier," he'd griped through the amused smirk.

Harry only laughed.

"No, I couldn't; it was his hex to begin with."

Blaise's lips turned up, and he gave Harry a congratulatory nod.

Hermione had been shell-shocked. She opened her mouth, then got a confused look on her face, and tried again. Thankfully, Harry had put her off asking about it fairly quickly.

When he woke that Saturday, the dorm was nearly empty. Quidditch try-outs were being held again on the pitch, and it looked like he was the only one who hadn't gotten up to audition or watch. Ignoring the growling in his stomach, Harry threw on some clothes and left the dorm.

He climbed the stairs, not really watching where he was going.

"Harry!"

Harry turned in mid-step, and was caught by the sight of Ginny in a pink sundress.

"Morning, Ginny."

"Why aren't you at the Slytherin try-outs?"

Harry made a face.

"I'll still be rooting for Gryffindor this year, and besides, Malfoy's team captain and Seeker."

They stood for a while in silence, Ginny shifting uncomfortably from foot to foot. Harry searched desperately for a topic of conversation; Ginny looked like she was searching with him, her eyes darting back and forth, and slowly lowering. Ginny raised her eyebrows and opened her mouth to say goodbye, but Harry interrupted her.

"Hang on, then. How did you know about the try-outs?"

"Oh, Ron's gone to spy. He's really hoping that they don't put you on their team. And he says that since Katie's captain, and she'll be gone next year, he'll have the most seniority on the team."

Harry chuckled.

"Already got it planned out then?"

Ginny shrugged and gave him a half smile.

"You know how he can get."

"Better than anyone."

They exchanged smiles. He rocked slightly on his heels, the thought of discussing Ron making his stomach go queasy. But somehow, that was the only thing he could think to talk about. Or maybe Hermione. Or Quidditch.

"Well, I'll see you later. I've got to go meet Dean."

"Yeah, later," Harry said, sighing with relief.

Harry waved and they gratefully went their separate ways.

\*\*

That evening, Harry waited in the Slytherin Common Room, huddled close to the fire. He drummed his fingers on the arm of the chair and compulsively checked his watch. Blaise and Pansy were sitting across the room, working on schoolwork and laughing every once in a while. As Harry watched, Blaise called a seventh year girl over to sit with them.

The Slytherins were getting ready for a party later tonight.

Harry had no idea why, but they seemed to need to release some stress. Not that he couldn't relate; it was a Saturday night, and the year had already turned out to be extremely difficult. The girl Blaise was talking to laughed loudly. Harry tried not to stare, but now Blaise and the girl were really hitting it off, and Pansy was smirking at them. But they seemed to be holding back, like they were waiting for something, and Harry didn't know what it was. The minutes ticked by, everyone waiting for something. The fireplace was starting to gather heat, it was getting too hot, surely just a few more minutes, and everything would be okay to go ...

When the minute hand finally hit eight, Harry was already on his way through the halls to meet the Headmaster.

The teachers he passed ignored him, and the Prefects turned their heads the other way. Finally, he reached the griffin statue that concealed the stairwell to Dumbledore's office.

"Acid Pops," he whispered to the griffin, and it moved aside. Harry quickly stepped onto the revolving staircase and it carried him up, jerking every once in a while, as though it needed oiling. When the stairs finally jerked to a stop, he reached out a tentative hand and started to knock, but Dumbledore's kind voice rang from the study.

"No need to knock when you are expected, Harry."

Harry hastily opened the door and stepped into the office. He looked about for any sign of what they were about to do, but the room was the way it had always been, not one of Dumbledore's instruments misplaced. A shock of guilt flashed through Harry's gut, but he growled inwardly and it went away as quickly as it had come.

"Sir?" Harry asked, raising his eyebrows.

"I'm sure you are wondering what will take place tonight."

Harry nodded and took a seat facing the Headmaster.

"I believe, as you have reached your sixth year, you have a certain need to know what most wizards can only dream of."

Harry nodded, his foot twitching against the floor. He tried desperately not to be impatient.

"You need to understand your enemy fully. Voldemort has always been an elusive man, and that makes your task all the more difficult. To know that you are the only one able to really end this war must be a heavy burden, almost impossibly heavy. It is my wish that you understand the man you are expected to kill."

"What are we doing tonight? Spellwork?"

"Hardly."

Harry looked into Dumbledore's eyes, searching for any sign of macabre humor on the man's face.

"Does this have anything to do with the Prophecy?"

"It has a great deal to do with the Prophecy."

That much should have been obvious.

Dumbledore stood and walked past Harry to the cabinet that held the old man's Pensieve. Harry eagerly watched him as he reached into the cabinet, the long sleeves of his robes trailing through the air. He brought out the magical basin. When Dumbledore carefully placed the glittering silver relic onto his desk, the runes flickered at Harry in the candlelight. Another, very different, kind of guilt started to pool in his stomach.

"Don't be worried, Harry," Dumbledore said kindly.

Harry tried to relax, but somehow as the surface of the memories changed and swirled, he could not help but be reminded of his own personal mistakes, of other memories he did not have the permission to see. Over the summer, he had thought over and over his experiences with the Pensieve; first, with Dumbledore's Pensieve, and next with Snape's own painful memory. He had stolen something from them both, gone where he had no right to be.

The amount of trust that one old man was showing him in this simple action was dizzying. He'd already violated this man's right to privacy; there was no reason for this trust. And yet here he was, in front of the Pensieve once again, about to jump into someone's personal memory.

"You must surely know that I am giving you permission to enter the Pensieve this time, Harry."

Harry looked up at the old man, and he wondered again if the man could read minds.

"What are you going to show me, Professor?"



"I'm not entirely sure myself, but I can safely say that I trust Bob Ogden was right to give me one of his memories."

The old professor held up a small vial filled with what Harry could only assume was a memory.

"It is rare," Dumbledore mused, "when a man allows you to see his memory. When he gives you something as precious as an event. To gain trust like that is to gain a true ally."

"Did you know Bob Ogden well?" Harry asked.

"Very well. He was a great friend to me while he was still alive. I knew him as a good man who worked in the Department of Magical Law Enforcement. Before he died, I had convinced him to hand this memory over to my safekeeping. It is a memory of one of his duties; an assignment he was forced to go on so many years ago."

Dumbledore drew his wand to uncork the vial and tipped the contents into the other memories. They didn't mix. Harry noticed that they seemed to be made of different patterns and materials.

"After you," Dumbledore said, motioning for Harry to duck his head into the bowl.

Harry drew in a deep breath and held it. He slowly touched the water and felt a pull around his middle as he was tipped into the Pensieve.

\*\*

The sounds of the raucous Slytherin party followed him up the stairs to the upper years' dorms, and Harry started to take off his tie. His breathing became slightly easier as he topped the last step. His light jacket hung heavily on his arm as he pushed through the door to his dorm, the light dim and just barely concealing the only other occupant of the room.

A loud screech came from the Upper Classmen's study room down the hall, and Harry winced as it shot through his head, piercing his headache with brutal accuracy. Harry closed the door behind him and lit one of the candles by his bed, its dim light revealing the slight mess around Malfoy's bed. He felt eyes on his back and dropped his shirt to the floor, ignoring the blonde. Harry kicked his shoes off lazily, undoing his belt. He let his trousers fall to the floor and immediately went searching for a clean pair of sleep pants, tripping over his feet as he stumbled through the dorm. He didn't have the energy to button up a sleep shirt.

Clothed in a pair of pajamas, Harry shuffled into the bathroom. He brushed his teeth in slow, weary motions that glanced across his gums every once in a while. Harry spit, washed the sink out, and splashed water on his face. The shadows under his eyes had become pronounced, and his lips were pulled downward by gravity, his jaw slightly slack.

But Harry never cared if he looked like shit.

When he stepped back into the dorm room, Malfoy was still staring at him. He quickly averted his eyes and went back to his work.

Harry collapsed onto the bed, exhausted, and pulled the thick covers over his body. He buried himself deeply in the pillow. His last thought before drifting off to sleep was that Malfoy had closed his curtains without even raising his wand.

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He flung his long blond hair away from his face, arms deep in the mud and clothes smudged with his work.

Somehow the guards hadn't caught his plan yet, and somehow he had a feeling they weren't going to.

The cells of Azkaban that were meant for the most dangerous of prisoners were buried deep underground. Many of the prisoners had escaped with the Dementors, but Lucius had been in solitary confinement with no way to join their ranks.

The Ministry had taken his wand from him and kept him under the watch of two Dementors constantly. They had hoped that his madness would consume him, that he would not be able to escape because he would become crippled.

Now his guard had been replaced with a human.

As he continued his slow, methodical work, he mused that part of the reason the occupants of Azkaban went mad was listening to the others wail. But in his cell, at this vantage point, he could only sometimes hear their faint screams.

Every evening, at six o' clock, his guard would flip open the little slot on his door, and every evening at six fifteen he would hand the empty plate back. It was only ever once a day, and the food was never anything spectacular, but there was a point months ago when Lucius had stopped caring.

While this would have been crippling to those Ministry minions who had locked him up here, it was a bit of normality. That they had allowed him a watch was their first big mistake. He and his captors had established a relationship based on their routine; the days could be counted by how many times he had vomited into the cell toilet. He even kept a tally in the dirt underneath his cot.

Gradually he had become less human and more a creature of pattern, of logic. It had been a long time since emotion had played across his face, since he had thought of those things that were supposed to tie him to his human life. He no longer masturbated to the memory of Narcissa on their wedding night; he no longer wept for his only son.

All he could think of were those shrieks, those wails, those screams that he could hear, so faintly, through the walls.

He knew he should feel some sense of loss over the whole issue; he knew that he should wish for his own sanity back. But he also knew that it was through this forced loss of emotion that he had accomplished his brilliant plan. Ironical, that it was once this very loss of emotion that had crippled him.

But he needed four different kinds of clay.

And thus, he was digging. Down in the mud, like a servant. Like the servant that he was. Hopefully he would no longer be a simple slave to his master's will, but would rise above his lowly position and become an heir.

Four kinds of clay. That was all he needed.

He had the black clay; he'd scraped that off the walls ages ago. The sludge came from around the pipe that went through his room. And this dirty mud he'd been digging through ... he was covered in it. There was an overabundance. The sand had been difficult, but Draco had obligingly sent it in a letter. Fresh from the shores of Hogwarts.

Finally, he hit the best clay. The red clay. His very own buried treasure.

He heard himself start to giggle as he grabbed fistfuls of it, forcing it out of its coveted hiding place, and he rocked back and forth, triumph and euphoria the only emotions he had left to feel.

\*\*

The twisting path through Little Hangleton steered them past the Riddle Mansion proud and haughty in the distance down the lane, over the hills, all this in the cheery afternoon sunshine.

There was something not quite right about it all ... something that told of darker days, a cheery irony that mocked him. Ogden was rattling down the lane, almost running because the slope was so steep. Harry thought he shouldn't be running that fast; he would trip and fall, and he would never tell the Gaunts that they had to come to court. But somehow, miraculously, the man didn't trip, and it was with a shaky breath that Harry followed him. His entire body was tense, he knew what was about to happen, but Ogden was ignorant. They had almost made it to the little copse, only a few more steps and he would see Ogden stop and wait. Wait for something horrible to jump out of the trees. Harry would be ready this time ... this time, Morfin would pay for his actions ...

When Morfin jumped down from the trees, Harry darted forward, attempting to beat at him, but Morfin only gave him one knock to the head, and he was sent sprawling. Harry got up quickly, but Morfin was already hissing away.

One instant, he was hissing directly at Harry, the next Ogden seemed to reappear beside him, but Ogden never really seemed to be all the way there. He was hazy, and somehow Harry felt his own arms start to fatten, his chest filling out until he was Ogden.

"You're not welcome here."

The sentence rang around the hills, and Harry almost didn't catch what it meant.

*"You're not welcome here."*

"Er good morning," Harry felt himself speak, the words rattling around in his throat, but it wasn't his voice.

*"You're not welcome here."*

"I'm sorry, I don't understand."

*But he did understand! He understood perfectly!*

"Morfin!"

An elderly man was speaking, and Harry felt his shoulders start to relax, but as he came closer and the pervasive smell of Firewhiskey violated his space, Harry gagged and tried to back away. He fell back and tripped, his nose suddenly covered in orange goo.

"Got you in the face, did he?"

Harry glared at Gaunt, but he was only smiling, and Morfin was cackling.

"Busybodies, intruders, Muggles and filth."

*Defend himself against what?*

Hadn't he asked that?

They were inside, and Merope was scrabbling around on the floor after the frying pan. Morfin had not stopped his mad giggle, and Harry felt about ready to slap him. Ogden's body was trapped on the chair as Merope struggled, and Marvolo somehow managed to bellow a hiss.

Harry could feel himself getting more and more frustrated with everything, his body starting to sweat as he palmed the order the Ministry had sent with him.

Marvolo wouldn't listen to him.

"Mend it, you pointless lump, mend it!" He screeched at his daughter.

"Morfin has committed "

"I heard you the first time!"

"Morfin has broken wizarding law!"

*"Morfin has broken wizarding law."* He taught a filthy Muggle a lesson, that's illegal now, is it?"

Harry pulled the summons out of his coat pocket and attempted to hand it to Marvolo. The other man refused to take it, why exactly he couldn't tell, but he seemed more of a child than anything, his face twisting in the way that a baby's does when it doesn't have everything it wants.

Suddenly they were standing up, and Marvolo was thrusting his ring under Harry's nose.

"Slytherin's! Salazar Slytherin's! We're his last living descendants! What do you say to that?"

The locket that was shoved in front of him now was still attached to Merope's sad little neck, and Harry yelled. Her only savior came when they were distracted by the hooves of horses. Everything went quiet as Riddle sidled nearer the house, his arrogant voice carrying through their window like butter melting on a hot summer's day.

"Tom, I might be wrong, but has someone nailed a snake to the door?"

"-Good lord, you're right! That'll be the son, I told you he's not quite right in the head. Don't look at it, Cecelia darling."

*"Darling, he called her so he wouldn't want you anyway."*

There was more yelling, but it was quiet yelling now, like they were all hissing, but Harry couldn't tell the difference anymore.

*"She likes looking at that Muggle,"* Morfin taunted her.

*"Is it true? My daughter pure-blooded daughter of Salazar Slytherin hankering after a filthy, dirt-veined Muggle?"*

Anger in the room. So much anger that Harry was finally able to hurt Gaunt flinging him across the room with a deft wave of his wand, but next thing he knew, he was chased out of the room and away, up over the hills, running so fast that he couldn't hear anything but the buzzing of blood in his ears.

\*\*

*"Harry."*

*The voice purred his name this time, finding him in this jungle of a mind.*

*"Why are you crying, Harry? You are not hurt. You are still yourself. Don't be so silly."*

*The wet tears came down his cheeks, and his eyelashes fluttered. His intake of breath was unsteady at best, but when he exhaled, it was calm.*

*"There. That wasn't so hard."*

*"Mother..."*

*He could almost hear her smile.*

*"Yes, Harry. Mother."*

*"Mother?"*

*"You're alright. All you need to do is remember. Don't forget me, Harry, don't forget me. But that must be hard. You never knew me."*

*Mother ...*

*"Remember who you are."*

A vision of a snake crawling across the floor towards Arthur Weasley.

*Remember who you are.*

Ogden running away from the House of Gaunt.

*Remember who you are ...*

The Riddle mansion as it stands now, towering in the distance and one Muggle, Frank, about to die.

*... remember who you are ...*

Lucius Malfoy, digging frantically deeper into the mud.

*Remember ...*

Draco Malfoy standing up, his knuckles bloody and a sneer in place.

*... who ...*

A doorway, at the end of a long, dark tunnel.

*... you ...*

Ron Weasley staring at him in horror after the re-sorting.

*... ARE.*

Himself after the fight, watching Draco Malfoy stalk away and feeling more alive than he had all year.

Harry woke up.

He rolled over, the dreams playing through his mind, ghostly images of his subconscious. Malfoy had only closed the curtains on one side of the bed; the side that faced the bathroom was open, and Harry could see the haunting candlelight coming from it. There was no telling who was in the bathroom, but somehow he just knew that it was Malfoy, that he wasn't able to sleep either.

Harry got up on his knees and drew the curtains facing the bathroom shut, giving Malfoy what little privacy he deserved.

When Draco came back into the dorm and Harry was asleep, he faintly noticed that the curtains were drawn and smiled to himself.

*\*\**

*Lucius Malfoy Escapes Azkaban!*

Late last night, Minister of Magic Rufus Scrimgeour made a surprise trip to the wizarding prison Azkaban. He was summoned in the middle of the night by a man who claimed he saw Lucius Malfoy in the alley outside of his apartment. When Scrimgeour reached Azkaban prison, he found that half of the guards had fled and that the high-security cells were ransacked.

The most conspicuous and dangerous missing prisoner was one Lucius Malfoy.

Malfoy was arrested last spring after being found with a troop of Death Eaters in the Ministry of Magic. He was, according to the Veritaserum testimony of other Death Eaters found on the premises, the leader of the mission. He had been entrusted by He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named with an important task still unknown to us.

Lucius Malfoy was suspect of Death Eater activity during the first war, but pled the Imperius Curse. It was his father Ignatius Malfoy's service in the legislature that passed the law that the true pure-blood families would not be candidates for "such underhanded means of investigation as Veritaserum, Imperius, or psychological torture." (Rights Protection Act VIII, Title XII) At the time that this law was established, Barty Crouch Sr. was turning to more and more dangerous means of interrogation, even if the suspect had little evidence to warrant an in-depth investigation. His work was seen, in the mid 1970's, as being a standard of basic human rights. Myra Prynne's book on blood research had not yet been printed, and most wizards, while not agreeing with You-Know-Who, still allowed a caste system based on blood purity to rule our society. His efforts were seen as championing our wizarding rights, the fact that he quickly edited out any mention of protection for those with less than pure-blood was not mentioned the day the bill was voted on.

There is now speculation that perhaps this bill was meant to rescue his only son, Lucius Malfoy, from punishment when he was inevitably tried of Death Eater activity late in the war. Ignatius Malfoy himself is now thought of as a man who belonged to the higher circle of Death Eaters, his legislation holding true to the ideal He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named strives always to achieve. It is impossible to reveal how deep the Malfoy ties in You-Know-Who's circle reach, as Ignatius is now dead, and the bills he helped bring into law have affected the Malfoy trial this previous spring. It is safe to say, however, that Lucius Malfoy is most probably an important Death Eater in the workings of You-Know-Who's cult.

Over the years the Malfoy family generously donated to the Ministry, and Lucius Malfoy had earned himself a place as a school governor on the board of Hogwarts. He also held several low-responsibility but high-profile jobs around the Ministry. It is the main theory of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement that Lucius was attempting to continue his father's legacy.

Lucius was arrested last spring for his break-in at the Ministry of Magic. When the lesser Death Eaters were questioned, they refused to disclose any information. When put under Veritaserum, they revealed that they had been searching for a prophecy in the Department of Mysteries. Whether they were aware of the meaning of the prophecy or not, we may never know. The prophecy itself was lost.

The crimes committed under the Malfoy name that night are more than excuse enough to keep a closer watch over your homes; it is known that he will be able to acquire a wand easily. His wife, Narcissa Malfoy, has never been a Death Eater and walks free, not to mention their only son, Draco. Hell-bent on his mission, Malfoy may be more dangerous now than ever.

There is no telling what will happen next in this epic battle of the age, but we can only hope that the escape of Lucius Malfoy and the seeming betrayal of several Dementors isn't an omen for darker times ahead. *Marsha Owens*

## Several Relationships Develop

*Chapter 6 of 6*

In a stunning and rather unpredictable move, Pansy moves in to make Harry's life even more interesting.

**Author's Note:** Yes, this will still be slash. Pansy's just ... moving things along a little. XD

*Chapter Six:*

*Several Relationships Develop*

That week, all of the arrogance that Malfoy had lost returned full force. Harry noticed that his features were a bit less pinched than they had been before, and the boy had taken to loudly boasting that he and his family were going to rise again. He sauntered through the halls, ordering Crabbe and Goyle around as if he were a king. Hermione commented that he hadn't been that bad since fourth year, and Harry had to agree.

"At least you don't have to sleep in the same *dorm*. It's terrible!" Harry exclaimed furiously.

It was nearing Friday when Malfoy realized that his father wasn't going to contact him.

Harry worked steadily alongside his classmates in Slughorn's Potions class, attempting to avoid his notice. Slughorn had kept an annoyingly close watch on Harry all term, and Harry was very glad that their Slug Club meetings had been postponed, for one reason or another, all year. Hermione was sick this particular day, and he was working alone, which meant that every once in a while Slughorn would nose his way over to Harry's station to see how he was doing. Every once in a while being far too often for Harry's liking.

"But I haven't talked to him since the escape. What's she on about anyway?" Malfoy was saying irritably over his and Blaise's work. Harry leaned forward in his desk, attempting to eavesdrop without being obvious.

"Try explaining that to her and see if she believes you. Somehow I doubt she'll listen."

"But doesn't she know that I have more important things to worry about?" Malfoy hissed.

"Look, if she doesn't, she can just fuck herself," said Blaise, his voice rising irritably. "All I'm saying is that I'm sick of being involved in your business. It's not like you give a consolation prize!"

Harry tried not to seem like he was listening. Malfoy, exasperated, broke into normal speech.

"Look, I'll try to talk to her, but I'm not making any promises! I'll only bring it up if the opportunity presents itself!"

The knife Blaise was using hit the table with a sharp *thwack*.

"Oh, is my request getting in the way of your ability to twist her knickers oh-so-devishly?" Blaise's voice was irritated, and Malfoy immediately jumped to his own defense.

"Definitely not!"

He shot a calculating look around the classroom and bent his head closer to Blaise. Harry groaned inwardly as Slughorn got up and started to head for Harry's desk. Slughorn clapped Harry on the back and made a rather loud, annoying comment about Harry's potion that seemed to fill the room. Harry felt himself blush, and all ability to listen in on the conversation in front of him was lost.

Once the bell had rung and all the potions had been cleaned up, Malfoy walked past Harry and out the door. He sneered at him, and Harry sneered right back.

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"Oh, Draco, you can't mean that!"

Pansy's annoying wail was not the first thing Harry wanted to hear at the breakfast table in the morning. Resigned to a loud breakfast of Pansy and Malfoy fighting, Harry scooped some eggs onto his plate.

"Of course I mean it! Get off me!"

Pansy was clinging to Draco's arm, wailing about something he'd said. Harry rolled his eyes and thought that this had been coming for a while.

"But you love me!"

"Do you have any idea how annoying you are? Any at all? No? Then get away from me!"

Pansy's lip quivered, but to her credit, she didn't immediately start wailing. Instead, she tried to turn the quivering of her lip into an appealing pout. A group of third year girls started to giggle, but Pansy only muttered a few words under her breath. A moment later, they found their coffee had spilled over onto their robes and Pansy was storming

away.

Harry sighed as he finished his own coffee and small breakfast. Throwing his bag over one shoulder and standing up, he started to follow the other students leaving for class.

"Harry! Wait for me!"

He stopped and turned, waiting up for Ginny as she tried to politely push through a group of fourth-year Hufflepuffs. He smiled, watching as she apologized quickly and caught up with him.

"Hello. How are you?" he asked.

"Oh, I'm fine. Just trying to get some peace from Ron. He's in a towering mood over the Quidditch match on Saturday."

"Why? He's a fair Keeper."

Ginny shook her head.

"He can't get over his nerves, you know that."

Harry's mouth formed a silent "Oh," and he looked away, not trusting himself to speak.

"Are you going to the Masquerade?"

The question took him completely by surprise, and he gaped at her.

"What?"

They stopped walking and Ginny blinked up at him innocently, hugging her books to her chest. Harry looked about for any answer that wouldn't incriminate him, and any answer that would let her know he didn't want to go with her or Hermione, for that matter, as Harry remembered that Ginny was still with Dean. Oh God! She was trying to set him up?

"Er "

"Of course he is, Weasley."

They both wheeled around to look at Pansy, who was leaning against a pillar close by and had obviously been listening in on their conversation.

"But I seriously doubt he'll be going with you." Pansy's smirk was more of a simper, really, but it was effective in an annoying way.

"How would you know that Harry was going if he wasn't even sure himself?" Ginny asked, an angry glint in her eyes.

"Why, Weasley, because he has asked me for dancing lessons."

"Dancing lessons?" Ginny asked, her eyes bugging out slightly.

"You heard me the first time. Now, if you will excuse us, we have Charms to get to."

And with that, Pansy grabbed his arm and forcibly yanked him down the hall.

"What are you playing at?" Harry hissed at her.

"Glad to see you've gained some form of intelligence. Bravo! You've surprised me." She giggled a little bit, her nose scrunching up. Harry gritted his teeth.

"Oh, surely it's not so bad," she cooed, her lips turning up at the corners and one hand snaking up to pinch Harry's cheek. He thrust it away angrily.

"Just answer my question."

"You know I won't, so you may as well not even ask."

He really hated her singsong voice, her round brown eyes, and her hand on his arm.

Harry inwardly counted to ten. He should have known she wouldn't give him a straight answer. They were right outside the Charms classroom, and Pansy pulled him into a seat right next to her, with Blaise on his other side.

All through that lesson Harry mulled it over. She was fighting with Malfoy. They'd been bickering for ages (actually, it almost seemed like that was a normal part of their relationship). Today had probably been Malfoy's last straw. He wondered what she had been doing to annoy him so thoroughly.

*There must be something in it for her,* he thought. Somehow he didn't want to think that this was just some ploy to get Malfoy's attention, though he had to admit it would do that.

It was as he was leaving his second class that he realized he was thinking from the wrong angle. He was halfway through his turkey sandwich when he realized he should be figuring out how to use this to his advantage. His conscience was quickly silenced when Malfoy left early. Too early. Conspicuously early.

The only way to get close to these people would be to use them. If he wanted to get close enough to them to find out what Malfoy was really up to, he would have to manipulate them, and he'd damn well have to do it soon.

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*He was so cold. His fingers crunched, brittle, in the frigid weather. His long hair was nearly frozen over with icicles that broke as he flung it over his shoulder. He slipped in half-formed patches of ice, breaking the thin shroud on top, his feet bathing in puddles of dirty rainwater. It had been sleeting for several days, and he'd run every blessed one of them.*

*Muggles leered at him as he ran past them. His crazed eyes caught every annoyed, disapproving glance as they shifted back and forth. If he could stand the Muggle filth for thirty more paces, he would be at the old building. He would see it, in front of him, just out of reach.*

*Finally! He was safe, he was home. The door was flung open by a balding man who looked slightly like a rat, and the light pooled out the door as he rounded the last step.*

"Lucius."

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The next morning was Saturday, and Harry woke with a headache. He rolled over lazily in bed, still half-asleep, though he knew that wasn't just because it was so early.

Last night he'd dreamed of Malfoy. *Lucius Malfoy*, he clarified hurriedly. He tried to remember exact details of the dream, but that only made his headache worse. He curled around a pillow, trying to shield himself from awareness. Maybe if he didn't get up, he'd fall back asleep and wouldn't hurt anymore.

Fat chance. He'd only have more. Today was the Quidditch match, and he'd promised Hermione he would sit with her. He groaned and curled up tighter at the memory. Hermione seemed to think that things would get better if Harry sat with her, but Harry really doubted that. Funny looks and possible confrontation aside, he was pretty sure Pansy would come looking for him. She'd been hanging off him since they had allegedly "gotten together," and he was sick of it. If this was anything like having a girlfriend, Harry didn't want one.

"Ngh, fuck," Harry swore, sitting up and rubbing his head. He yanked open the curtains and got unsteadily to his feet. He stumbled over an open box and grabbed his glasses off the night stand.

When had everything gotten so dark? The light in this dorm was so muted, Harry could barely see where he was going. He dimly registered that Malfoy's curtains were open. He blinked and squinted into the darkness. His bed sheets had been yanked back, and his trunk was wide open. Some of the contents were strewn about in disarray, and he'd left his pajamas on the floor.

What the hell?

Crabbe and Goyle's beds were empty too. They normally slept in late on the weekend. So why the hell were they already gone by eight o' clock? Malfoy was no morning angel either, but Crabbe and Goyle were just pathetic.

The curtains around Blaise's bed were closed, but Harry couldn't feel the spark of a privacy spell radiating off them.

Harry nervously knocked on one of the posts.

He had watched Blaise stumble up to the dormitory from the common room last night with a sixth year Slytherin girl, so he was desperately hoping that he wasn't interrupting anything ... important. The girl had been giggling all night as she flirted shamelessly with Blaise. Harry had watched the two with annoyance and curiosity as the night wore on, and when he had retreated to bed, Blaise's curtains were muffled by a privacy spell.

The curtains quickly parted, and Blaise sat up, obviously irritated, but there was just something else about him that Harry couldn't quite place ... Blaise was half covered, his chest naked. When he saw Harry, he smirked languidly, and blinked slowly.

"Potter. What a pleasant surprise. How can I help you?"

His voice was practically purring with arrogant pride.

"Um I er, that is to say ..."

"Good lord, Potter! Pull yourself together! It's only sex."

Harry shook his head decidedly, once, and he desperately tried to remember his purpose.

"Have you seen Malfoy anywhere?"

"No, why?"

"Because he, Crabbe, and Goyle are missing, and I needed to ask him about our assignment. For Potions."

Harry knew his excuse didn't even sound like a remote truth.

"I wonder if Daphne's seen them. She's been up ... should be somewhere around here. Hang on."

Blaise stood up, covers no longer hiding his nudity. Harry quickly reminded himself not to look as Blaise walked along the bed and recovered his sleep pants. He put them on slowly and motioned for Harry to follow him. Harry could feel himself blushing as the red scratches on Blaise's back curled with each movement. Blaise stopped to knock at the bathroom door, staring down at his feet.

Daphne opened the door, in the process of putting on her lipstick and smiled at Blaise.

"Daphne, you haven't seen Draco lately, have you?" Blaise asked, wrapping his arms around her.

"No. Is Potter looking for him?" Her eyes glanced at Harry's beet-red blush, and she smiled prettily.

"Yeah, I am," Harry cut in, feeling more and more like a peeping Tom.

"Well, I certainly haven't seen anyone but you two since I got up. Maybe try the Great Hall?" The innocence in her voice belied the devilish glint in her eyes.

"Yeah, piss off," Blaise said, not taking his eyes off Daphne. "Silly thing, why are you even putting that on? It's only going to come off any way." He took the tube of lipstick from her hand and kissed her temple. She giggled as Harry turned around; whether from his embarrassment or Blaise's attentions, Harry couldn't say.

He quickly got dressed, not wanting to witness any more. His hair was wild, but it would only get worse, and Harry realized at the door that his shirt was on backwards. He quickly flipped it right-side forward and stumbled, slightly dizzy, out the door and into the dungeon hallway.

The bright morning light seared Harry's eyes as he made it to the main floor stretch of hallway. He weaved his way through the crowd, students' conversation bubbling around him. When he stepped into the Great Hall, he quickly decided against stopping by the Gryffindor table. Ron was sitting between Hermione, Ginny, and Neville, ashen-faced and hands trembling. He would only see it as a bad omen if Harry stopped by.

Harry kept an eye on the Gryffindor table all through his breakfast, attempting to ignore Pansy, who was prattling on beside him about absolutely nothing. When the Gryffindor team rose as one and left the hall, Harry excused himself and walked over to talk to Hermione.

She and Neville were in mid-conversation when he arrived, and Neville's eyes got very wide, but he didn't say anything.

"Hey, guys," Harry said, sitting down next to Hermione.

"Harry!" She gave him a quick hug, and Neville smiled hesitantly. "Oh, I'm so glad you came over. We haven't had a chance to talk to you much this week ..."

"Yeah," Harry mumbled, glancing around nervously. Several Gryffindors were taking an interest in his presence and were craning their necks to stare obviously at him.

"Are you sitting with us at the match today?" Neville asked, eyes bright, and Harry heard a distinct note of hope? in his voice.

"Yeah, if anything to get away from Pansy for a few hours."

Hermione's mouth fell open.

"So it's true then?"

Harry's eyes glanced around the hall quickly, and he nodded.

"What's true?" Neville asked.

"Harry and Pansy. There've been rumors."

"Well, sort of ... it's not really romantic. She's just getting back at Malfoy for pissing her off."

Hermione's brow furrowed, and her lips pressed together disapprovingly, but she didn't say anything.

"W-we should probably get going," Neville stammered, glancing quickly between the two of them.

"Yeah," Harry said, and he got up to follow them.

Harry tried to force conversation, but since his confession to association with Pansy, Hermione had been shooting him disapproving glares. Neville was trying valiantly to play middle man, but Hermione seemed determined to let Harry know she wasn't happy with him.

Soon, Harry had other problems to think about. He'd managed to keep his head down in an emptying Great Hall, but now that he was following his two friends up into his old house's stands, it was hard to fend off the stares. Hermione was obviously starting to get over his confession and was even able to laugh at his jokes.

They settled in towards the top of the stands, but stayed cautiously close to the exit. It seemed that the three of them had an unspoken agreement; Harry might need to leave quickly, and so they should make retreat as easy as possible. Harry sat stiffly on his bench, completely uncomfortable in this territory. When Seamus clapped him on the shoulder from behind, he coughed in surprise, and shifted quickly so the boy wouldn't have to sit on him.

"Good to see you're still on our side!" the Irish boy guffawed, patting his back. Harry smiled.

"Good to see I've still got more than two good friends," Harry replied, and Seamus' jaw dropped.

"Did you honestly think that we'd leave you behind?" he asked incredulously.

"Uhm well, it's happened before," Harry admitted sheepishly.

"We've been through too much to let that happen!" the Irish boy exclaimed.

Harry thought that was a bit rich, coming from Seamus, but he didn't say anything.

"But you know," Seamus said as he leaned in conspiratorially, "you're wearing the wrong color."

Hermione laughed as she saw Harry's expression, other Gryffindors he'd known filing in to seats next to him, a strangely evil glint in their eyes. Harry let out a shout of surprise when Seamus attacked him, red and yellow paint smeared on his fingers and seeming to get everywhere but onto Harry's face. He pulled two cans of paint out from under the bleachers, and soon all of the Gryffindors were joining in. They laughed lightheartedly as Seamus' last globs of paint were smeared all over the Slytherin crest on Harry's chest. Neville, laughing in that twisted little Neville way of his, helped Harry up and back onto the bench, hair spattered with flecks of red and gold.

The large painted handprint on the back of Harry's robes stood as a testament to their zealous friendship.

Harry cheered just as loudly as the rest of them when the teams marched out onto the field, and he pumped the air delightedly as the teams took off. Hermione took up a running commentary, much louder and more important than Zacharias Smith's drawling speech over the loudspeaker. She was filling Harry in (with much interruption) on the Gryffindor activities since the beginning of the year, every once in a while interjecting loud groans or cheers as the game was played out.

"Wow. When did Ron get to be such a good player?" Harry asked as he watched Ron make a particularly good save.

"That's what I've been wondering," Hermione said, replaying the save through her omnioculars.

"I've been sitting in on practices." Lavender leaned in close to Harry's ear. "He's been really passionate this year. Couldn't tell you why, but it's just like it clicks."

"Huh."

Harry watched Ron's form as he triumphantly pumped the air. The teams were all rushing toward the center of the pitch, their robes and hair flying out behind them. Harry missed Smith's commentary, his attention fixated on Ron.

"What happened?" he asked, jumping to his feet as the Gryffindors cheered wildly.

"Ginny caught the Snitch! It came out of nowhere!" Hermione screamed over the crowd, her cheeks pink with excitement.

The players came down off the field, and Hermione tugged on Harry's arm. He laughed, jumping out of his seat and rushing out to meet the players.

When the two of them stepped out onto the pitch, Harry heard a high-pitched squeal as Ginny came running toward them.

"You came! You came!" she shrieked as she jumped into his arms.

"How could I miss it?" Harry laughed, giving her a huge hug.

"Oh! You're even sporting the right colors!" She giggled, spotting the flecks of paint Seamus had gotten all over him.

"Yeah, and they're all over you now, too." Harry grinned mischievously, but Ginny just waved him off.

Harry's eyes were drawn past her to Ron, who was scowling at them and ignoring Hermione's pleas to stay. Ron turned abruptly on his heel and left, broom over his shoulder, to the changing rooms.

"Oh, no," Harry said, but Ginny was already talking to Dean, and no one seemed to have noticed Ron.

"Harry, are you coming up for the party?" Dean asked, his arm around Ginny and a bright smile on his face. He looked incredibly fit in his Quidditch robes.

"No, no, there's something I have to do."

Dean shrugged.

"Fine, suit yourself."

Harry lagged behind as people started to clear the pitch, and once all the players were in the showers, and all the fans headed back to their common rooms, Harry sat down outside the door to wait for Ron.

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Two hours later, Harry was tired of waiting.

"Ron!" he shouted, fist pounding on the door and blood rushing in his ears. "Ron! I know you're in there! Ginny told me you were hiding!"

"Piss off!"

"If you don't let me in right now, I'm coming in on my own!"

There was a muffled shriek from inside.

"Hang on a minute!"

Harry heard rustling coming from behind the door, and soon Ron stuck his head out.

Harry immediately felt guilty. He was very pale, and had a strange look in his eyes, one that he had seen once before, after the first task his fourth year ... He looked like a scared little boy.

Shocked to see the effect he'd had on his best friend, the paranoia that danced in those hurt blue eyes, all the rage spilled out of Harry, and he completely forgot what he was going to say.

"I'm sorry." The words left him before he'd realized what he'd said. "I is now a bad time?"

"That depends on why you're here," Ron snarled, but it couldn't cover up the fear Harry had already seen.

"I just wanted to ... er, congratulate you. You flew really well today."

Ron's mouth dropped open, but he didn't say anything.

"I've missed you."

Harry knew the words were lame, but he couldn't get anything else out. Harry cursed inwardly, not knowing what to say in this sort of situation ...

"I guess I'll just go, then ..." Harry tentatively turned around, but what happened next stopped him in his tracks.

"I've missed you too."

Ron blurted it out, as if he had no control over what he was saying. Harry wondered if Ron had even admitted that to himself yet. Harry turned to face the other boy, who was finally coming out of the locker room.

"What happened to you? Luna's lion hat get sick all over your robes?" Ron muttered under his breath, but there was a little smile around the edges of his lips.

Harry laughed.

"No, Seamus happened."

"Oh," Ron said, smiling. "So that's what that paint was for ..."

Harry smirked, and without warning Ron ran for the castle.

"Race you back to the castle!" Ron shouted back to Harry, who ran, laughing, behind him.