

Regrets

by RachelW

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Madam Pince flicked her wand along the bookshelves, the dusting spell making little progress in the years upon years of dust in the library. She'd requested the house-elves be reassigned for a thorough cleaning of the library, but it seemed that providing five-star cuisine for unappreciative teenagers was to remain a priority.

She heard familiar footsteps and held her breath for a moment, heart pounding, just as it always did when he entered her library. He was searching the shelves, and as he passed he gave her a perfunctory nod. It was anguish to see him day after day, to sit near him at the High Table at meals and trade small talk, when he was occasionally inclined to grunt an answer.

He never spoke of his mother, never. Not once in the seventeen years he'd worked at Hogwarts had he done so, at least that she had heard, and she listened at every possibility, hoping against hope that she might hear a kind word, or any word at all. She feared for him, that his new assignment as DADA teacher was a bad sign, that Dumbledore's injured arm too was a sign of horrible things to come.

It was probably best that he didn't recognise her. She'd never seemed to do him much good anyway. If he did say something about her it would be far from kind, and rightfully so. She'd never been able to provide anything he needed, not the stable home or a father he could respect, not the money he'd felt so deprived of as a child, and not the bloodlines – the bloodlines he so craved. Marrying that Muggle had been the worst mistake of her life, and it was Severus, her darling Severus, who had paid the price for her misdeeds. If she had been a good mother, would he be a happier person now? Would the Dark Mark be branded on his arm?

Dumbledore had hidden her, helped her to hide from those who would retaliate, or from anyone who might pass on information of her whereabouts, knowingly or not. He'd promised her all those years ago that she could be safe, that he would make it possible for no-one to recognise her. But when her only child had looked at her during the first staff meeting they'd attended together, Dumbledore had made the round of introductions, she wished more than anything to be able to tell him the truth. He had no idea where she was, probably thought she was gone for good, that she didn't want to see him.

Dumbledore had allowed her to choose her own name, and with some thought, she'd chosen Irma Pince. At least in her new name she could hold a small bit of her former identity. Whenever she signed her name, she would mentally rearrange the letters... I'm a Prince, she affirmed every time without fail. I'm a Prince.