



MEDDLING GIANT

SI-Hagrid Fanfiction.

Words: 36k

Rating: T

Genre: Fantasy-Adventure

Characters: Rubeus Hagrid, Tom Riddle, Minerva McGonagall, Horace Slughorn

I own nothing. The site on which I'm more active is still fanfiction.net, under the name cloud9stories, once my stories reach a certain threshold between followers and number of words, I upload said story on my personal site (cloud9stories.net) in pdf format.

I decided to set up yet another SI in the Harry Potter world, this time I'll keep an eye out for characterization, and I won't half-ass it simply because I want to finish the story. There are a lot of ways to start an SI fic, but I feel, like many others, that giving some sort of cause to the event helps giving meaning to the whole story. Everyone can start an SI placing themselves inside of Dumbledore head at the height of his power, but that, while undoubtedly cool, won't make for a terribly interesting story. Another version is starting out as reincarnation, which doesn't need to be scrutinized too closely, since by definition it lingers upon the idea of death which is beyond human understanding. On the annoying side, being reborn forces the MC to grow up from the start, and is forced to either completely ignore all bonds, since the MC had those in his previous life and doesn't feel like lying to the people around him (refusing to replace what he has lost), or unreasonably feeling part of the world he was reborn into from by the Author's will.

Entering a world that you've read about as fiction doesn't help you form meaningful and sane attachments unless there is a part of the world that makes you consider it as real and worthy of yourself. Here is born the 'merging' technique, which drops foreknowledge inside someone's mind and you find yourself piloting a life that has affections already in place. This technique is great from the writer's point of view, since it allows us to get immediately started with the juicy part of the story (and you as the reader won't need to read through the first couple of chapters written by someone that feels forced to in order to set the tone and the world of the story).

So, besides being reborn (boring at the start), merging (annoying because you have to take in consideration a regular kind of character), or simply being dropped into the world (a nightmare if one needs documentation), there is only another option: an incident or knowingly executed mad experiment that sets the SI in the place of the consciousness that drives the body of the author's MC.

The choice depends on what the author wants from the story he's going to write. AU fictions (and by that I mean those in which the SI is the leading part of the story instead of a passenger of canon) tend to be best served by the reborn-style or the dropped-in-world-style (that is on average, each author does as he/she please).

I Own Nothing

A promise of fire

The first sensation I could feel, was a constant throbbing at the back of my head. It wasn't painful, per se, but it was annoying just enough to grab my attention, and just like that, as I instinctively moved my hand to cover the building pain at the base of my head, I discovered that I had a body.

With the sense of touch and self-awareness, came the distant but persistent, throbbing pain in the back of my head, where, by touch alone, I found something that felt like a splinter.

I hissed in pain as my fingers found the offending appendage, and I started pulling it out of my skin, methodically so that it wouldn't break further and leave behind other pieces of wood.

"-beus! Rubeus! Are you well, my son?" my hearing returned fuzzily as the splinter that I was holding between my nails finally abandoned the wound. Even so, I blinked heavily a couple of times as I forced myself to stand, my hands failing to find purchase on the minute shoulder of a child that was busy hollering in my ear with a voice deeper than I would have imagined a child capable of.

Once I was to my feet, I eyed with a frown the child dressing up as a wizard that barely reached above my elbow: "Rubeus!" he called... me?

"Rubeus are you well?" the child dressing up as a cheap Gandalf spoke.

Who the fuck is... I opened my mouth to try and calm down the child in the scary good wizard costume, when another voice made my eyes snap up.

"Oh, my, such a reaction from a wand I didn't expect, oh no. I'm terribly sorry Mr. Hagrid, but wands not always follow our expectations."

It was a voice I knew well. I voice that I heard endless times both as a kid and as an adult, John Hurt's voice: the actor that spoke as a dragon in Merlin, as head of the dictatorship in V for Vendetta, and the actor that had been... Ollivander.

My eyes bulged out as a Jhon Hurt that didn't look one day older than 25, and that to be truthful didn't resemble the actor I had seen him as, but the voice, oh, that was the same. Then the words he spoke hit me.

"Wands?" I repeated, feeling a deep baritone voice I was utterly unfamiliar with leave my lips as I studied the room I was in.

It was a tiny place, empty except for a feel of importance that I couldn't really grasp. I felt somewhat as though I had entered a very strict library. I forced myself to swallow a lot of questions which had just occurred to me, which ranged from what the hell was happening to what kind of wands he did have in store, and looked instead at the thousands of narrow boxes piled neatly right up to the ceiling.

As I watched transfixed at the countless lines of wands, I felt a whisper of wind against the back of my neck, the very dust and silence in there seemed to tingle with some secret magic. I felt almost like I was underwater, like I had corked ears due to the shift in pressure, but it wasn't it. I raised one hand and dragged it in front of my face, expecting to feel some kind of resistance, so I frowned when it moved normally through the air.

Ollivander busied himself around me to pick up the mess that I had made when I fell, likely before my awakening with hat now I realized had been a broken wand embedded in my head.

Ollivander was holding the snapped pieces of bloodied wood in his hands with a sorrowful look on his face, all the while the... *not a child*. I stopped myself, returning my attention to the concerned... *actual wizard? Is this real?* Who was busy tugging at my sleeve: "Rubeus, answer me! Are you well?"

I nodded gruffly: "It's nothing." I replied, with my voice still deeper than the one I was used to, and as I spoke I noticed how the man had been calling me, along with the Mr. Hagrid that the young Ollivander had offered. *Does this mean?*

I looked myself over, realizing that it wasn't the small man to my side that was under dimensioned, but that I was at least two meters tall, maybe with something to spare.

I took a deep breath, trying to not freak out. *Rubeus Hagrid, the half-giant that never tried to do magic since he got expelled? The one that went to school with Riddle but never managed to learn stuff? Oh shit...*

"Well, Mr. Hagrid, you're still alive, and welcome surprise as it is, perhaps we should return to matching you with your wand, shouldn't we?" Ollivander's voice made itself known after he deposited the pieces of the broken wand on one side of his desk.

Then I started trying wands, first with my left, then with my right, as to be truthful, I had no idea which arm would be better for casting magic *in a fictional world while I overtook the body of one of the more iconic characters*.

"Pine, with a very old Ukrainian Ironbelly heartstring, exactly 13 inches, stiff."

I slowly raised it with my left, feeling a tingle from my wrist to my elbow, encouraged, I waved it toward my left: **boom**, and gone was the vase in the corner.

The flowers inside were dead anyway. Even while thinking that, I put down my wand feeling a bit guilty: what if I simply wasn't worthy of a wand? Hagrid clearly hadn't needed one to live happily, but I wasn't exactly as simple-minded as the half-giant of the books had been.

What if being... *what the fuck am I?*... what if my presence would prevent me from using a wand?

"Whistlethorn, with a Snidget tail feather, ten and a quarter inches, rather bendy." I felt a zap stopping at my fingers there and waving it again towards the vase' shards I caused them to embed themselves into the wooden wall. *This answers my question on the materials he uses, I thought belatedly, even if he can't have that much experience now, can he? Hagrid went to school with Voldemort, and Riddle was around 50 years before canon, wasn't he?*

"Eleven inches of mahogany, with a single Nundu's whisker, very springy." That one burned my fingers before I could do anything with it.

What am I going to do? I grimaced inside the safe confines of my mind as I tried a wand after another, should I give up magic? Was I stuck inside Hagrid's body? It wouldn't make easy disappearing among Muggles, would it? What to do, what to do...?

Ollivander went on giving me sticks to wave around for a full half an hour with varying degrees of success, before humming some more as he returned to rummage through his endless aisles of magic sticks.

Without really realizing what was happening, and without hearing Ollivander's words, I grasped yet another wand, immediately feeling repulsed by it. It didn't even distract me from my funk, should I give it a try and assassinate Riddle while he was at school? But he hadn't done anything bad yet, had he? Would you kill Hitler if you met him as a child? Would you do in Cortés knowing that he would lead the extermination of the Aztec? *I... I kind of would.* I realized.

And right now Riddle wasn't a Dark Lord yet, merely a very squishy teenage wizard, and I was riding the body of a demi-giant, one that I remembered tanking stunners from the Harry Potter books.

Maybe I shouldn't take my situation as something bad. I thought as yet another wand failed to elicit a reaction out of me. *I'm here, maybe Hagrid was shit at magic, and even somewhat insane, but I sure as hell am not.*

As that last thought travelled through my mind, I managed to focus once more on the people and the events around me. If Hagrid managed to crossbreed whatever the fuck the Blast-Ended Skrewts were, without instruction and without a wand, what was to say I couldn't do much more? Who was to say I couldn't do every absurd thing that came to my mind? Who was to say that I couldn't manage to forge Narya inside a volcano? Or cross-breed a Venusaur out of nothing? Who was to say that I couldn't be the actual best thing happened to the world since sliced bread?

Another thought washed over me: *what if I stop Hiroshima and Nagasaki? No, that would fuck up the war and maybe we would be ruled over by Nazi, but hiding the people? Helping them? Stop the attack on the World Trade Center? Maybe I'm still in time to save Gandhi.*

I could do and become anything I wanted: there were potions to distil liquid luck, spells to call forth storms and create secret passages between walls, Faeries and Cerberi, secrets nobody knew anything about, and the future of the world to shape if a single man was in the position of doing something about it.

And I could. Given the longevity that Hagrid had shown in the books, I had a lot of time to become everything I could be.

A smile blossomed on my face as I watched Ollivander go still for a moment before handing me a wand, his far too large eyes studied me for a couple of seconds before retreating the offering wand: "Very interesting Mr. Hagrid." he spoke softly, making me raise an eyebrow in expectation and the man that I supposed was my father sigh in exasperation as yet another wand was taken from my hands.

"Yes, I wonder..." the wand-maker walked back into his store: "I suspect that the best wands can be made only with the core of phoenix feathers, unicorn tail hair, and dragon heartstring. A few years ago I managed to secure a couple of Phoenix Feathers..."

Oh fuck. I thought as I imagined what was going to happen. *C'mon, this cannot be actually happening, what about Potter?*

"The wand chooses the wizard. That much has always been clear to those of us who have studied wandlore... These connections are complex. An initial attraction, and then a mutual quest for experience, the wand learning from the wizard, the wizard from the wand." Ollivander spoke softly, "But both the wands that I have crafted out of that particular Phoenix' Feathers seem to wish for a willful wielder..."

The wand-maker returned towards me with a shrewd gaze in his eyes: "Wands cannot choose if their wielder has no direction whatsoever, it is curious that you, Mr. Hagrid, appeared to both lose and find again your direction between the time you were blasted off your feet by that oak wand and this very moment."

"Holly is one of the rarer kinds of wand woods, you know. It is traditionally considered protective, and it works most happily for those who may need help overcoming a tendency to anger and impetuosity. At the same time, holly wands often choose owners who are engaged in some dangerous and often spiritual quest. Holly is one of those woods that varies most dramatically in performance depending on the wand core, and it is a notoriously difficult wood to team with phoenix feather, as the wood's volatility conflicts strangely with the phoenix's detachment." the wand-maker words spoke softly as he regarded the piece of holly in his hands.

He opened yet another case and held it expectantly towards me: "Holly and phoenix feather, eleven inches, nice and supple."

I only needed the first three fingers of my left hand to pick up the wand, and I decided, in that split-second, that I wouldn't care about my foreknowledge, that I would be the fucking best because I had the imagination necessary to be such a person, that I would fuck up the entire course of history in the hope of directing it on a better path, because I could, and because I wanted to.

As I raised my wand, something surged through me, and a spurt of golden flame blossomed from the tip of the holly length of wood, accompanied by the echo of a soft thrill in the distance.

And I felt *alive*.

Fandom tells me that Hagrid was born from Fridwulfa and a random wizard in the West Country of England, near the forest of dean, where he lived with the father until his death at some point before Hagrid started to be the Groundskeeper (Rubeus' third year is when Riddle framed him), Hagrid Senior was smaller than Rubeus by the time the latter was 6, and given that he was 3.5 meters tall by the time he was adult, I'm placing him at a stable 2 meters until he hits puberty proper.

I have already played with people being reborn, with people being dropped in, and I don't enjoy the idea of taking the 'merging' route, mostly because the characters that I'd care for using as a mixed vessel for my SI are perfectly fine as they are.

In this fic, I'm going with a random-ass accident that drops our SI in the body of an eleven years old Rubeus Hagrid (born 6 December 1928, so it means that we're already in 1939, the year in which Hitlers starts his 'Plan Z', year of the earthquake in Chile (30k dead), year of the first appearance of Batman (detective comics number 27, by Finger and Kane), year of Einstein signing the letter that warns the president Roosevelt of the potential use of uranium in a theoretical atomic bomb).

Ollivander was born in 1908, and in so he's 31 in this chapter, but he obtained both phoenix feathers before 1938, so it makes sense that both the yew and holly ones were already around.

I hope you enjoy this premise and the fic that will follow.

In case you missed it, this will be AU.



AN: correction to my previous chapter: Hagrid started Hogwarts in 1940, ergo when Riddle started 3rd year.

I've decided to use what I can from the three Fantastic Beasts and where to find them, and partly because of that, there is going to be a very dense timeline in this fic:

1938: Riddle's first year & Beginning of open war (Wizard Global War)

1940: Hagrid's first year (which is the now in the story)

1941: Dumbledore destroys the blood pact between him: the actor is Jude Law in the movies of Fantastic Beasts, but I'm going to use a book version of him, so imagine a young version of Dumbledore from the first Harry Potter Movie.

1943: Chamber of Secrets: in the memory of Riddle, the actor of Dumbledore is Richard Harris, so as I've said, that's how I imagine him.

1945: Grindelwald-Dumbledore duel

It will be a nightmare to make everything work as I've envisioned it, but I'm going to try and involve the MC with the Great War and other stuff going around all over the world.

I find Harris work as Dumbledore to be my favourite, so I write with him in my mind, even so, I'll try to not linger too long on descriptions of the man, so everyone can picture who prefers into the role.

A Giant First Step

After my confusing but undoubtedly rewarding shopping at Ollivander's, I found myself walking behind Hagrid's diminutive father across Diagon Alley.

It was... wild. Each and every building was skewed in this or that direction, the signs sang loudly about the goods inside of the shops, and just behind a panel of glass, the shop-owners had clearly tried to outdo each other in presenting a magnificent piece of their craft. A shop was entirely dedicated to lenses, and there was a selection of monocles hung in the shop window, each rimmed with a different material that glittered under the bright sunlight of a typical July's afternoon. The apothecary had an actual cauldron waiting above the entrance, from there spilt out in lazy waves twirls of feathers that turned out to be water drops that glittered like diamonds in the light before falling back into the cauldron, and from there yet another unique manifestation of magic was born.

To be entirely truthful, given the competition that I could spy from my two meters and something of height, Ollivander was the only one that didn't need the showmanship.

Slughorn is teaching potions, isn't he? I eyed the apothecary without truly knowing what to think about the man. On one side, he was a consumed Slytherin, meaning that he didn't think anything bad of speaking about Horcrux-related shit with Riddle, on the other, he didn't seem to be particularly prejudiced about muggle-borns, which, given the time period I was, was nothing short of outstanding.

Despite having only Dumbledore, Grindelwald and Tom as examples of truly extraordinary mages, it didn't look like sexism was a thing in the magical community, at least from what little I had been able to witness. And maybe it made sense, why would a witch be any less powerful than a wizard? Bellatrix had proven herself the second in command of Voldemort for anything battle-related in canon, didn't she?

"C'mon, son, let's go home!" my... no, Hagrid's father exclaimed excitedly as he led me across the alley, even as I distractedly observed funny little witches from the country up for a day's shopping, venerable-looking wizards arguing over the latest article in *Transfiguration Today*, wild-looking warlocks and what I imagined were raucous dwarfs, I kept trying to come to terms with my situation.

Surprisingly enough, the thought that I had been chosen by Potter's wand... - no, it was my wand now - didn't fill me with too much trepidation: Riddle could be anything from 3 to 2 years my elder, since I remembered him being a prefect at the time of the Chamber of Secrets. *Didn't he call back the basilisk because of the possible closing of Hogwarts? That means he had yet at least a year to complete at school.* I reasoned as I followed the diminutive figure of Hagrid's father.

A sigh escaped my lips, there were many things I needed to think about: I had already decided that I would do as I wanted, and to hell with any potential future, but I needed concrete goals, something to measure my progress. My fingers grazed briefly the wand in my wide pocket, and I relished in the warmth that surged up my arm and down my back.

The only certainty that I had, for the time being, was that a wand had chosen me: I was capable of magic, which in the world of Harry Potter, had a wide range of possibilities.

I took a pinch of glittering powder out of the pot resting on the mantelpiece, stepped up to the fire, and threw the powder into the flames. With a roar, the fire turned emerald green and rose high, swallowing me as I shouted: "Hagrid's House!" and I vanished in the blaze. It felt as though I was being sucked down a giant drain. In the blurry hurricane of green flames, I felt like I was being spun very fast, and the fire roaring in my ears was deafening. I dutifully kept my eyes open, trying to figure out what I was supposed to do, and looking through the stream of fireplaces I managed to catch glimpses of the rooms beyond, even if they were gone too fast for me to properly understand what I was looking at. Eventually, the whirlwind of fire slowed down, and as soon as he recognized the diminutive form of Hagrid's father, I took a tentative step out of the fireplace.

I always wondered how exactly flooing worked. What if two people wanted to go to the same place at the same time? It still made sense that shouting 'Diagon Alley' one would floo through all the open fireplaces of the Alley, after all, Borgin & Burke had a fireplace since Harry ended up there.

Banishing my rambling thoughts, I looked around the room I had stepped into: it was circular with a diameter that could easily reach ten meters, while the ceiling sat at a height of roughly 4 meters. *Well, more than a ceiling proper, it's the underside of the roof.* I could tell from simply looking at it that it was made of dark slates, even if somewhat hidden by the dark wood beams from where selected few plants were hanging.

In the area immediately surrounding the fireplace, there was a couple of armchairs of ridiculous proportions: clearly, one of the two had been realized with the size that I would one day reach in mind, while the other was angled so that the one sitting in it would be able to see both the fireplace, the eventual guest in the bigger seating place, and the tall door that presumably led outside.

On my left, illuminated by both the light of the fireplace (the flames had stopped burning green just as I finished flooing in) and the daylight entering from the thin slits that were the windows letting me glimpse the woods outside, there was an opening in the wall, and from the smells, I suspected that it led into a kitchen, and from there, I hoped in the rest of the house.

I know that canon Hagrid lived in a hut on the Hogwarts grounds, but he was unable to use magic, I hope his father managed to magic the building up a little. I frowned as I followed the bustling man into the kitchen, where he had already set a large bowl of stew upon the large table made of the same dark and somewhat worn wood that I thought composed the beams supporting the roof.

With my mind still trying to come to terms with the situation, I found myself nodding distractedly to the bumbling man chattering my ears off: "It's lucky that we had enough for your books and clothes!" he chuckled merrily, "But the joke's on the man of the second-hand books, the notes on those will likely help you! Are you excited? I sure was at my time, oh if only..."

The somewhat small man kept rambling good-naturedly while I ate my stew, noticing that even if it was July, it wasn't as hot as I would have suspected, and the warm stew was welcome in my stomach.

Without really thinking about it, my wand was lifted into my fingers as I marvelled once more at the feeling it gave off. It was unlike anything else I had ever felt: in the same way the hot stew could be felt warming up my oesophagus as it reached my stomach, my bones felt like they were smouldering when the wand was twirled in my fingers. *I guess I should count myself lucky that I've still somewhat human*

proportions for now. What will I do when this body becomes 3,5 meters tall? My pinky will be bigger than the wand.

My eyes fell on the bustling man that returned to washing the bowls before tiredly walking towards the fireplace, where he lit a pipe and started smoking, his cheerful mood turning thoughtful as he kept reminiscing about his youth. *At least he used magic in order to set the kitchen.*

After a somewhat awkward (at least on my part) month, it finally came the time to go to Hogwarts.

I reached the platform 9 and 3/4 without issues and with time to spare. Apparently, the entirety of Magical Britain was bustling around, and the clothes were just one of the numerous reminders that I was in 1940. At my distracted eye, it looked like the numbers of muggle-raised and wizard-raised wizards and witches kind of matched, but that could simply be a wrong impression.

What hit me the hardest was the normal slang that kept leaving me grasping for straws. Sure, maybe it was because I was kind of eavesdropping only on pieces of conversation, but when a couple of muggles started to define a well-distinguished man as a 'cake eater', I was left fumbling for meaning.

I had insisted to arrive early, partly to avoid any unnecessary interaction with my 'father', who still had no idea I clearly wasn't the real Hagrid. *I don't know what that says about his parental skills. Maybe Hagrid inherited his brains both from his father and his giant mother?* My thoughts stopped immediately once I started wandering in dangerous territory: how the hell did a wizard get a giant pregnant?

Without thinking about the practical aspect: why would someone *want to have sex with a dumb as a brick 8 meters tall woman?*

Once I settled down in an empty compartment, I unsheathed my wand, still enraptured by the feeling of being complete that it gave me. My palm caressed with wonder the handle that my father had added to the wand in 'order to have it fit me no matter how big I became'. Not gonna lie, that particular piece of magic, beyond making me feel somewhat guilty because I had taken the place of Rubeus Hagrid, did somewhat warm my cold Hagrid-impersonating heart and impress me at the same time.

I had never thought about a wand-handle that would grow to adapt to my size, and the simple gift from the only wizard that I had properly interacted with so far had sharply reminded me that I had absolutely no idea about what magic was actually capable of doing. Sure, I could figure out snippets and make up my theories from my metaknowledge and the books I had already read, but I suspected that hands-on practice was the only thing that was going to actually give me an idea of what was possible and what I had to figure out my own branch of magic in order to realize.

Because like hell I'm going to let anybody tell me what magic is possible or not. I thought with a corresponding burst of warmth running through my arm and into my wand, where it turned into the small golden flame that I had grown accustomed to. It had happened occasionally in my home during the month that I spent experimenting (immensely glad as I was that for some reason, the Ministry didn't seem to pick up on magic use where I lived, giving credence to the theory that the Ministry could only pick up magic in areas around underage wizards, having no idea of who actually performed the spell).

I exchanged polite nods with the nondescript students that trickled in, while I was secretly amused by their furrowed expressions at my size, that clearly didn't match one of a first year.

"A potion accident when I was a child." I lied with a polite smile when someone questioned me on my height. I remembered Ron thinking that much when Hagrid's secret came out in *The Goblet of Fire*.

But my mind was focused on my next steps: was I going to be able to swindle the cap? would it keep my secret? would it be better for me to end in a particular house? All were questions that I had fruitlessly attempted to answer for the previous month (only after my excitement for magic had somewhat died down).

Now recapping the steps and rules for the Great Plan to Live Long and Happy:

- 1) Find a way to quietly kill Tom Riddle: maybe it would be best done in the muggle world
- 2) Study magic
- 3) Make my own magnificent magic, which may or may not include something randomly impossible like colonizing Venus.

This translated in the short term with something like absolutely abusing the Room of Requirement, both to learn Occlumency and figure out a way to duplicate the Marauders' Map, which sounded terribly important, as well as to research what kind of dangers lurked where the ordinary wizard dared not tread. Was the Fae real? The train was running towards the Scottish Highlands, so perhaps there was something interesting to find out? After all, House Helves had turned out to be a cheat code around most wizard-made magic, being stopped only by dementors, as stated by Kreacher in the Deathly Hallows. Did it mean that there was a relationship between those?

The train finally arrived at the Hogsmeade Station, where, towering among a gaggle of admittedly diminutive (at least to my eyes) first years, I followed a gnarly man that declared himself the Groundskeeper and finally claimed a boat for myself, given my outrageous size.

The evening was quiet and without wind upsetting the water, which looked like an endless table of polished ebony, gleaming under the starlit sky. The boats moved silently while the eleven years old around me endlessly chattered in careful whispers, everyone aware of the *importance* of the moment.

Once we surpassed a low stone bridge, I won't deny that my eyes turned wide like everybody else's, admiring with quiet marvel the imposing castle, lit by countless torches that shone through the windows.

From the sharp lines of the towers' tops to the smooth presence of the stone walls, Hogwarts seemed to stretch itself towards the unreachable moon, as if it was a rampant horse showing off its strength.

The boats smoothly pulled over the water and onto the gravelly beach that led towards a ramp of stairs, which stopped in front of a ridiculously tall double door made in what I thought was oak. Without further issue, the Groundskeeper lifted a circular, iron knocker, letting it fall three times before taking a small step back.

With a heavy shudder, accompanied by an important groan of the ancient wood, the doors opened inwards, as to invite us in. Given my height, I was free to see the wizard ready to welcome us: he was tall, wearing a conservative robe that matched the traditional wizard's hat resting over his greying hair, while his sharp blue eyes roamed over the crowd, stopping for an instant over my oversized form before he flashed everybody a warm smile.

"Welcome!" spoke Dumbledore, "Welcome to Hogwarts! I am Professor Dumbledore, Deputy Headmaster of this fine institution. Soon, I'll walk you through those doors," he tilted his head towards another set of double doors that rested inconspicuously on one side of the circular room, "and I'll be calling your names in order to have you sorted."

My eyes droned over the young-looking Richard Harris while I ignored his brief description of the Houses and the House Point System, which even a child could easily divine. *Admittedly, at 11 years of age, I am a child.* I reproached myself quietly as a single man we finally followed Dumbledore.

Why did I remember him to be always dressed like a punch in the eye? I frowned as I stared at the back of the powerful wizard, my annoyingly cynical mind providing answers that depicted the man as a war relic that sought comfort in bright colours from the knowledge that he had been the one to defeat his own lover. I immediately banished the thoughts about the future appearance of Dumbledore from my mind as soon as I realized what I was thinking. Until I learned Occlumency, it wouldn't do to let my mind wander.

I stiffened minutely when we entered the Great Hall: four long tables littered by students wearing matching ties led to a larger one where several adults sat, looking over me and my peers. I immediately heard the baffling comments about my size, but quite frankly, I was busy staring upwards like any other child that had never witnessed a nightly sky shining just above a sea of floating candles.

Dumbledore walked towards the end of the Hall, where he climbed a few steps, eyeing meaningfully the infamous battered hat that rested over a wooden stool. A patch on the front of the hat opened like a mouth, powering up the illusion that the thing had an actual face, and he started to sing.

He sang of a castle raised from the ground, of peace offerings brought to the Deep Forest, of a Wild Lake calmed down, and of people coming together with a single, noble purpose. To create something revolutionary that would last across the ages: a school of Witchcraft and Wizardry, where the Founders then choose their apprentices on the basis of what they valued most. Of Noble Gryffindor and Unrelenting Hufflepuff, of Inquisitive Ravenclaw and Ambitious Slytherin.

Soon enough, Dumbledore started calling forth students, and my eyes returned to the rest of the Hall, where the students eagerly awaited either the sorting of someone they knew, or the actual end of the sorting, that would announce the beginning of the Welcoming Feast.

I spotted a promisingly beautiful Maggie Smith seated at the Gryffindor table, and obviously, my eyes eventually found one Tom Riddle, who was seating with a polite expression on his face, looking at the Sorting, like everybody else.

My fingers found my wand as I considered my position. Dumbledore would take care of Grindelwald, but Tom was going to become a big ass problem eventually. It was lucky indeed that he had been topped before the year 2000, otherwise someone was bound to mess up and break the Statute of Secrecy, given the never-ending push of technology. Would it be more useful to be sorted randomly? Or to be sorted in Slytherin, where I could keep an eye on Tom, or at least from where I could gain his 'trust', enough to invite him over, where I could kill him quietly?

I grimaced as the answerless questions once more flooded my mind, and too soon, my name left Dumbledore's lips.

With a shallow sigh that nevertheless managed to ruffle the hair of the children closest to me, I lumbered forward, walking the steps and eyeing with mistrust the frail-looking stool that was supposed to support me. I eyed Dumbledore, who was looking at me with a shrewd glint in his eye. When he nodded indicating the stool, I decided to trust that he wouldn't wish to humiliate a child on his first night away from home, and I awkwardly sat.

The Hat was placed over my head, and I kept looking at the Hall since I had an adult size and the brim wasn't going to cover my eyes. Only then I thought that if I wanted to keep my secrets, a mind-reading Hat wasn't likely to be my best option.

Talent, and wish to test yourself! The Hat's voice sounded heavy in my head, making me startle momentarily.

Then I wondered if it was going to answer my unanswered questions. But if the Hat was capable of reading actual thoughts and relating them, which Pureblood would have sent their child to Hogwarts? Or wouldn't the Hat at least warn the Headmaster of the psychos in Slytherin?


Not only that, but to change the whole world! To create your own magic! To be ruthless in the pursuit of your dream!

Too late I realized that the decision about my House was already taken away from my hands.

"*SLYTHERIN!*" the hat shouted for all to hear, leaving me with a single thought in mind while my eyes briefly crossed a couple of dark ones from my House.

I fucked up.

AN



I had actually forgotten that Dumbledore is not headmaster, and so he's the one to welcome the firsties, very much like McGonagall will do in the future. And hear this: McGonagall's age has always been inconsistent in canon. Originally JK Rowling said that she was 70 between books 4–5 which would put her birth year at 1925, a year older than Tom Riddle. We are then given her Pottermore backstory which gives her a birth year 1935. In the new Fantastic Beasts movie she's already a teacher in the 1920s! For the sake of this fic I'm going to assume that her original birth year is the correct one. We're never shown scenes of them interacting in flashbacks, nor do either mention encountering each other during school. Still, as two highly brilliant students, I could imagine them being in the Slug Club together where they could've had a few conversations. They also may have served as prefects together. Other than this I doubt that they would have much to do with each other.

And yeah, someone that actually plans to use his life to set up a new world order cannot be anything but Slytherin.

Lesson Given, Lesson Learned

The Welcoming Feast had delivered on the expectations I had from my metaknowledge, and after stuffing ourselves, meeting the ghosts, and being generally warned from the Forbidden Forest by Headmaster Armando Dippet, we first years followed a male Prefect charged with leading the way.

"You're a big one, aren't you? How did it come to be?" I turned my head to my left, where a dark-haired girl, with her badge shining proudly on her robes, was eyeing me with open curiosity.

"Potion accident when I was a child," I offered my practised lie with a thin smile, "I was too curious for my own good I suppose."

And that was that.

We were led from the Great Hall through a confusing set of stairs and corridors, finally reaching the dungeons while the prefects explained what their role was: "I am Joseph Deverill, she's Genine Carrow, we're the fifth year prefects. So if you need anything in these first weeks, don't hesitate to ask. Now, try to remember the way, and don't tell it to anyone from the other Houses, it's a secret."

The trick to not getting lost is just keeping going down. I thought to myself as I looked over the ambience. Gone were the great windows and almost none airy landings. In fact, the corridors were noticeably smaller, and dare I say it? Even gloomier.

After two utterly unremarkable suits of armour and a nook for a lit torch, the prefects had us stop in front of an apparently random stretch of wall, where he spoke: "*Palnam qui meruit ferat*".

The blank wall seemed to unfold with a sound of grinding stone, not unlike what I remembered from Diagon Alley's entrance. The resulting archway let us access a large room made of granite, characterised with leather couches around low coffee tables, armchairs and lit fireplaces situated in locations in order to stave off the cold and damp. It was, without a doubt, the most dungeon-like room I had ever seen, with greenish lamps and chairs. This dungeon extended partway under the lake, which gave the light in the room a green tinge.

The common room had lots of low backed black and dark green button-tufted, leather sofas and dark wood cupboards. One of the wooden tables had a Wizard's Chess set on it, where a couple of older students was playing while drinking what I was certain wasn't water. Where the walls weren't bare, the room was decorated with tapestries featuring the adventures of famous Medieval Slytherins.

It has quite a grand atmosphere, but also quite a cold one. I thought as my eyes landed on one side of the room was placed the largest fireplace, which roared merrily and around which the older students seemed to hold council, or some tripe along those lines.

There was a piece of abhorrently classical and slow music playing from a gramophone and the quiet chattering of students covered the room in a white noise not dissimilar from the pattering of a shy rain.

While I ignored the repetitive explanation about House Points and Quidditch, prefect Joseph led us towards one archway, that after a few meters let us in a circular room that held seven minor archways, whose contents got lost in the darkness: "Each corridor contains a number of rooms." With a twitch of his wand, a brilliant '1' appeared on our left. "Each year the corridors slide clockwork wise, so now you'll always know where your room is. I suggest you don't try to bother the older years: stay in your corridor. And don't even attempt to enter the gals' dormitory, the wards won't let you."

Joseph Deverill simply gestured towards our corridor: "The House Elves will bring your belongings once you choose a room, so tuck in, your first week will be demanding, I suggest taking as much shut-eye as you can."

I let out a breath that I didn't know I was holding when it was revealed that each was going to have his own room, that we would keep for the seven years and that would be returned to its original state once

we completed our stay at Hogwarts. *I'm never letting anything important in my room.* I decided as I walked towards the first room, the other firsties, still somewhat wary of my size, were all too glad to follow my lead.

My room was more akin to a cubicle than an actual room, with just enough space for a bed, the trunk that appeared at its feet, and a bathroom that was actually somewhat lavish. And not for the first time, I was overjoyed that I was born after the invention of toilets. The idea of shitting in a hole on a plank of wood did not amuse me in the slightest. *Then again, maybe wizards had a solution before plumbing became a thing.*

I eyed my bed with a critical eye: "I'll need to learn *Engorgio* properly sooner or later."

Relishing the warmth from my wand as I waved it in a slow clockwise circle followed by a jab, envisioning the result I was expecting while I willed reality to bend, I spoke: "Engorgio!"

Almost as if I was using Word to process an image, it looked like I had taken an angle of the bed and pulled following the diagonal, causing the width and the length of the bed to grow in a proportionate manner.

With a satisfied smile, I undressed and went to sleep, briefly considering trying a *Colloportus* in order to secure my room before abandoning the idea. One thing was using a charm that I managed to study upon the books that Hagrid's father kept since his time at the school, a whole different kettle of fish was attempting something that I was aware of only thanks to my metaknowledge.

So I simply pinned the door in position through my trunk, heaving it easily with a strength that I still wasn't used to, and then went to sleep.

My first days at Hogwarts went by in a rush of lessons and impromptu explorations. It was all too easy to get lost when trying to navigate the castle, which in my opinion had a tendency to spontaneously rearrange itself. *The books only spoke about the Stairs Moving, there was no talk about magic fuckery going on everywhere.*

Defence Against the Dark Arts was for now mostly theory, listing a number of minor magical creatures that were somewhat nasty unless you knew how to deal with them, but we were weeks away from learning actual magic.

Herbology had very little to do with magic in my opinion, and a lot to do with remaining calm, caring for nothing but the greenery around you. While I didn't particularly enjoy having to scrub the dirt from beneath my fingernails, I bulldozed through my tasks with methodical stubbornness, and dutifully memorized the information about the plants, hoping that at least they would turn out useful in Potions.

History, sadly, had one very dead Professor Binns as its teacher. So I spent those hours either doing homework or preparing diagrams in order to study History on my own.

On Tuesdays, just before midnight, we had astronomy with Professor Summit, a woman who always had a pair of binoculars hanging from her neck. Her class took place at the top of Hogwarts' tallest tower, where we poked our telescopes between the crenelations to chart the heavens with sleepy eyes. It was interesting, more or less, mostly because the stars and the other celestial bodies influenced the development of some potions I had read in the Library, but otherwise useless. Sure, I was aware that a Basilisk hatched from a chicken egg under a toad after a night of the full moon, at least listening to my metaknowledge, but for some reason, I doubted that we were going to be taught the importance of starts during the creation of rituals to create lethal beasts that we could drop on our enemies.

But, if Herbology, Astronomy, Defence and History were somewhat exactly how I had thought they would be, Charms, Transfiguration and Potions actually caught my interest.

Besides the frustration born out of my occasionally getting lost, which I did in fact share with all the others first years, to the amusement of the older students, it appeared clear that *using* magic was not a

priority for our professors, which were busy making inane questions that challenged the absence of logic of Wizardkind in a way that did not make sense.

"To cast magic, you must first understand what it is you are doing," explained Professor Farsee in Charms. She was a small, elderly witch, not more than five feet tall, and of a serious disposition: "You can pronounce an incantation beautifully, move your wand with exquisite precision, and yet nothing will happen if your head contains no more understanding of magic than does a Muggle's!"

Sarah Wingtip, a first-year Ravenclaw with whom Slytherin shared Charms, raised her hand from her place next to me: "But sir, what about accidental magic?"

"An excellent question!" Professor Farsee exclaimed. Her voice ascended in pitch when she got excited, temporarily abandoning her gravelly tone in a way that managed to convey her passion for the subject: "In truth, all wizards can cast some rudimentary magic without training. Think of it like a conversation with someone who doesn't speak English. You might be able to get by, a little, with pointing at things. If you have a mind for languages, you may even pick a few words up. But to have a proper conversation, you need to learn their language. So it is with magic."

From the back of the class, where I could easily oversee everything going on, I raised my hand and asked once I was called by the elderly witch: "The 'language' of magic works through what then? Symbols? Is that the reason behind the wand motions?"

I earned 2 points for my House with my insightful question, which received an affirmative answer: "But then if the symbols make sense only to me, would it be possible to use different wand-motions in order to perform the same Charm?"

And just like that, I lost 5 points because my questions disturbed the normal advancing of the class.

See, the part that nobody seemed to understand while reading Harry Potter, was that the coursework was prepared for *eleven years old children*, who, no matter how talented, had a mind that admittedly could easily grasp new things, was also limited by both their difficulty to grasp an abstract concept, and the general limitations that they subconsciously applied to magic. Either because they grew up knowing about magic, and thusly were aware of the most common limits, or because they were muggle-raised, and thusly still not taking magic as the first path towards the completion of a task.

I, on the other hand, was an ex Art student that had lived in the far future, with access to fiction books that described my current circumstances. So I was pretty much convinced that everything was possible.

I had a growing number of theories about the workings of magic, which were obliquely confirmed by the words of Professor Farsee: "Remember, when we talk about fire we do not just mean literal fire. It's much more than that. Fire is a symbol, your understanding of said symbol brings out several ways through which you can imagine its application, while the wand motions, when matched with appropriate intent, will create an actual charm."

Still, it was clear to me that eleven years old children weren't meant to actually understand the woolly explanation about the theory of charms, not fully. And despite that, they actually managed, when the time came, to make their quills tentatively quiver upwards in the air.

The levitation charm was obviously one that I had read extensively about: it was iconic, and if Ron Weasley managed to use it to defeat a Troll of all things, I sure as hell could do much more than that.

In the last lesson of our first week, we actually got to levitate quills, and it went without saying that I performed admirably. What was the difference between lifting a quill and a whole desk? Surely weight did not matter if Weasley managed to lift a troll's club. And if there was some kind of limit, I was vastly within it, given my comparative size to the other children.

With an unenthusiastic rush of warmth that ran across my arm when I moved my wand, I levitated the desk, along with everything else that I had upon it.

Professor Farsee saw fit to give me five points for the charm and detract two for disturbing his class.

When we finally had Transfiguration, I felt almost jittery. My faith was immediately rewarded, because Dumbledore was not only the first teacher that actually had us use our wands, but also an all-around kickass wizard, that somehow had managed to remember that Magic was *Magic*, and that to face it with anything but enthusiasm was bloody foolish.

"Transfiguration is some of the most complex and beautiful magic you will ever encounter." Dumbledore started out jabbing his wand at his desk, which churned on itself for a split second before becoming a proud lion, which eyed us students with a bored gaze before looking at the Deputy Headmaster with a flat gaze that seemed to be unimpressed.

With another twitch too fast for my eyes to follow, the lion surged forward, scattering midflight into a flock of swallows that churned just beyond the reach of my hand while everyone let out a flabbergasted sound at the impressive demonstration, after a few seconds, the birds returned towards Dumbledore, turning into black and blue butterflies for an instant before amassing themselves one upon the other and merging again in their original form. Only that now the desk was anything but ordinary: in relief around the base of the wood, a rampant lion spewed a river of swallows from its roaring mouth, which turned midflight into the butterflies we had just watched change shape.

Now, that is magic. I didn't even pretend to contain the smile on my face, and I stared unerringly at Dumbledore, captivated just like any other 11 years old child.

"While Charms is dedicated to the change, enhancement, or even creation or negation of properties of both animate and inanimate things around us, Transfiguration is a branch of magic that *changes* the very shape of what or whom it is used upon." Dumbledore smiled genially at us while his twinkling blue eyes studied our reactions.

"But just as this branch of magic is complex and beautiful, it is also dangerous. It does not wear off, and the reversal of a Transfiguration is an advanced skill that very few can hope to master. As such, I expect that each of you will apply himself fully in this class, and that you will not allow your attention to waver before attempting a transfiguration, no matter how inane it may appear in your eyes." then he smiled, cutting off his serious tone with his genial attitude: "But then again, I already knew that each of you was going to try his hardest here, hm?"

With another twirl of his wand, on the blackboard appeared a triangle, with each side as long as the others, followed by one inscribed in a dashed semi-circle, and another that had two sides that stretched from one side of the blackboard to another: "Now, we can all agree that these are all triangles, yes?"

At the general assent of the class, he went ahead: "But I bet that each of you can imagine several different forms that nevertheless fall behind the rather large umbrella of 'triangle'. So, now this I ask of you, which triangle is *better*?"

And at that moment I discovered that Dumbledore was an asshole because despite the obvious question of 'what do you mean for better triangle' gently forwarded by a Gryffindor, the Professor let the class despair for ten whole minutes before erasing completely the blackboard: "Very well, we now agree that there is not a triangle better than others without a context that would give us a parameter on the basis of which we could make our choice. Now, I want each of you to trace a circle with your quill and ink on a spare piece of parchment."

"Notice how all these circles have imperfections, and yet we can still recognise them as circles?" Professor Dumbledore showcased his own slightly wobbly version of a circle realized on the blackboard: "This is because a perfect circle, or a perfect triangle, don't actually exist. Or better yet, they don't exist in our world, and the circles or triangles we draw are more or less correct imitations of their Ideal-Form. We perceive that these imperfect circles share features with the perfect circle, even though none of us has ever seen it. We know that as long as a figure has only three sides and three vertexes is a triangle, but there are countless forms that are defined by such a definition. It is these Ideal Forms which the magic of Transfiguration calls upon."

This sounds like the beginning of Greek Philosophy. I grimaced briefly as I distractedly jotted down notes about Dumbledore's speech. In that class, we learnt of the two substances, physical and aetherial, and we remarked that we could only change the shape.

"Doesn't this mean that to reverse a transfiguration a wizard needs to perceive the ideal form of what the object was before?" I asked in a lull of the lesson.

Dumbledore's eyes found me with another of his genial smiles: "Not at all! If that was the case, you'd be simply transfiguring the object into something that resembled its previous shape. But that was a good attempt."

After more or less an hour of theoretical discussion that made much more sense than the Transfiguration issued book, Dumbledore had us put the quills down, apparently only having scratched the surface of Transfiguration theory, but he claimed that we were nonetheless ready to try our first spell.

Very much like McGonagall would ask in the canonical Harry Potter books, our task was to transfigure a matchstick into a steel needle, something that I knew was more complex than what it looked like, or at least in theory: changing an object's substance was much harder than simply altering its shape.

For a moment I just watched over my peers, which were busy with different iterations of the same spell, from shouting the incantation and overexaggerating their movements, to re-read the first half of the book before attempting, to try and bully the matchstick into compliance with half-hearted threats, and so on.

Everyone had their own approach to spellcasting.

In the end, I simply kept in mind the explanation we had been issued and an instant before attempting, I frowned: "How different can it be?"

Slowly dragging my wand over her matchstick, I spoke: "Lignovento!"

The matchstick shimmered and flowed, going pointy at the end and turning into a dull, metallic grey, making me frown when I spotted the grain of the wood in the metallic construct. *Why didn't it work? The incantation is no Latin, because if it was so, I should have had to use accusative coupled with the verbal command: Lignum Verto, so why...?*

"A commendable attempt, Mr. Hagrid," Dumbledore said, his eyes fixed on my work from all the way across the room, "Five points to Slytherin. Be sure to picture the needle correctly before attempting the spell. You'll learn that once-living materials such as wood don't like to be turned into dead metal. It will resist the change, so you must overcome it with a strong will and a clear image."

Like hell the will of a dead piece of wood is going to stop me. I frowned, and recast, making sure to keep the eye of the needle in mind once I reached the end of the metallic matchstick. The result was flawless

I left the Transfiguration lesson with more questions than answers, mostly about the exact mechanics of casting magic than the actual subject Dumbledore taught, but there was little I could do about my curiosity until I developed a somewhat reliable rhythm in Hogwarts.

Instead of a cold, grimy, stone laboratory with narrow, dirt windows and shelves lined with jars of strange Potions ingredients, for my first potion lesson I entered a long dungeon room at the end of which four cauldrons bubbled merrily, the afternoon sun entered muted from the narrow windows on one side of the room, while a large cabinet containing ingredients rested on the opposite side.

Horace Slughorn was, very much as he had been depicted as, a walrus in wizard' robes. Great moustache over a beaming mouth, eyebrow that shot up in surprise when he spotted my size, that thankfully he didn't mention, end a sharp glint in his eye that betrayed his generally laid back attitude.

"What," he began once everybody was placed behind a different desk, his voice full of expectation, "is a Potion?"

He smiled in faux apology when he didn't call upon anyone to answer: "Potions can do almost anything, truly, heal, rejuvenate, change the form of the drinker, bottle luck, the only limit is the ability of the brewer. And the ingredients at his disposal of course."

"You see, each potion is like a *story*, bringing together in a final result the meaning of each of its component." he clapped his hands excitedly, "If you've taken a peek in your book before this lesson, you'll know that it is basically a very thorough recipe book that keeps track even of the number of stirs, clockwise or counterclockwise, needed in order to bring out a determined result from within each ingredient."

When nobody spoke, an astute smile displayed itself upon Slughorn's face: "A demonstration is in order, I believe."

"Now," he started to talk as he rummaged behind his desk, "potion-making require precision in almost every aspect, for even the smallest variation can have disastrous effects on the brew. It is also true, however, that even the smallest variation, can bring out unexpected results that can be described as beneficial."

In a few moments, he had placed a pewter cauldron on his desk, and a smattering of ingredients, likely leftovers from his other lessons, were showcased on a white cloth over an opportunely enlarged portion of his desk.

"Now, let's see... let's see..." his hand shot amidst the ingredients with unerring precision, dragging out... *an acorn?*

"Yes, why not..." the walrus-like potion-maker murmured to himself, "we will try to make this acorn sprout into a small version of an oak, since I don't want to enlarge the room that much."

He had appeared like he was unsure of what he should try to create, but I wasn't sure about it. Slughorn gaze travelled across the classroom in order to check upon the undivided attention he was receiving, and then he smiled again: "I will need your help to decide on what ingredients will be needed," he stated, "Miss. Horine, which of these ingredients would you associate with life and renewal?"

"The Pugroot root is often present in healing potions..." said the first-year Slytherin and he pointed to one of the plants, though she seemed puzzled by the question.

I looked at the suggestion. The root was thick and heavy, dense and with thin filaments of red running through it.

"The pugroot gives birth to a plant is sturdy and with leathery leaves." Slughorn clarified for the sake of others that had no idea of what the student had been talking about, but he also shook his head: "But no, remember? I didn't ask to point me to an ingredient based upon what they're used for, at least not just that. It is about the feeling it gives, what it *means*. Here, better that I show you."

"This, the pugroot plant. It is all wrong. Life is about birth, growth, death and renewal. It is about green saplings and shoots, seeds and fruits. It is about striving and hoping and driving for more and better. This plant is none of those things. It is hardy and sturdy, it is about resisting death, not rejoicing in life." Slughorn spoke passionately, " There will be time to rely on preexistent recipes, for now, I want you all to focus on what I've told you: a potion is a *story*."

He looked at the other plants arrayed upon the white cloth until he saw something more suitable: "This one, though, is much better."

The bark was a youthful green and the leaves were soft and new despite the ever colder nights of the incoming winter.

"But that is from a Slither-Willow, it's poisonous!" stuttered out a Ravenclaw, which was busy crosschecking the choices of Slughorn with his copy of *One thousand Magical Herbes and Fungi*.

"When talking about plants and animals, death is a part of life," Slughorn smiled faintly as he rubbed one of the leaves between his fingers, "Without it, life is little more than existence, like a ghost who wanders the same halls for eternity."

Without hesitating, the Professor shaved off a small amount of the bark into the pot, "But you are right, poison alone will not work. We must add something to protect against it, do you have a suggestion?"

And so it continued. Sometimes a student would offer a suggestion and Slughorn would nod approvingly as he looked at the choice. More often than not, however, the Professor would frown and shake his head before explaining why he did not believe it was suitable.

Sometimes Slughorn told us about the ingredient: whether about the history of the plant, or the conditions in which it naturally grew, or if it flowered or spread. If the snake whose crushed fang he wanted to add was poisonous to animals or only to humans.

It was mind-boggling. I had *no idea whatsoever* about what was going on, and I often found myself inching forward, looming over the heads of my peers in order to peer into the cauldron Slughorn had set up.

"There," he said when the surface of the potion smoothed to a perfect leafy green. "It's done," Slughorn fished out the acorn he had secured at the beginning of the lesson and held it with only two fingers over the potion he had prepared: "Now we complete the promise we set up with the crushed quills and bat' eyes, with this seed, we give a target to the shaving of Slither-Willow."

Without another word, he dropped the seed... and nothing happened.

After five seconds, Slughorn pulled the pot off from the fire, and the magic began: the green liquid shimmered with inner light, sending a pleasantly fresh spurt of wind across the dungeon, and in seconds, the liquid inside the pot seemed to thicken and assumed a dark green colouration, like moss, while from the centre of the potion spurted a sapling, which grew quickly into a great oak tree thirty centimetres tall. Its leaves were healthy summer green. Its miniature branches rustled and swayed as if in presence of a gentle breeze, which nevertheless filled the air with a scent that had no place in the classroom. It brought to my mind long summer afternoons, the dry light scent of a long summer day.

This, I thought, my mind discarding the bullshit of Dumbledore's Transfiguration, *this is Magic*.

Besides a few brief visits, I hadn't managed to actually enjoy the Library, but after the first week of lessons, and after I half-assed most of my assignments, I finally found the time to freely explore it.

Besides a first area free of shelves, where stood the desk of the Master Librarian of Doom, who looked at me as if it the very thought that I was going to peruse the Library was outrageous, the Library occupied an undetermined large hall that seemed to extend as far as the eye could see, row upon row of books, divided in sections carefully labelled, with each shelf separated from the next one by one or more tables where the students could sit.

I had a vast variety of stuff that I would have liked to research, but it was somewhat of a given that I wasn't going to ever know *everything*. If Voldemort had needed to get Hagrid drunk in the Philosopher Stone in order to find out how to bypass a Cerberus of all things, it appeared clearly that the world was simply too vast, and with too many branches of magic for me to ever learn. Specialization wasn't exactly something that I liked to think about, but there was nothing for it. My solution? Learning enough of the basics and then fuck off to figure out *my own way* of doing magic.

Besides, I thought by myself as I strolled across the library, picking up a tome here and there, *a world-wide empire isn't going to build itself*. I stopped briefly when my eyes landed on the Restricted Section,

considering briefly a possible break-in before discarding the option, there would be time for that eventually.

"I'm starting to sound like a megalomaniac..." I muttered to myself once I recognized that referring to my vague plan about the future as 'the creation of a world-wide empire' didn't sound particularly sane. Nevertheless, I needed to acquire skills before setting out on my own.

Will I actually need 7 years of lessons here? I wondered as I picked up a thick tome about Animation. "Right after the war it's likely going to be the best time to set myself up economically." and the rhythm that the curriculum followed was extremely slow compared to what I could learn while I applied myself.

In the summer I can try out Apparition, it didn't sound like a difficult skill to learn. And that should take care of mobility. I only need a way to build a safe shelter, which implies some sort of ward, to eat and drink, and a way to keep myself and my clothes clean. After another couple of steps, I snorted: "Like hell I'm going to shit behind a bush, so I should learn something about that too."

When I started to have difficulty balancing the pile of books, I began looking for a place to seat. Surely enough, I spotted a large table, where a lonely third-year Gryffindor was sitting alone, the casual glare she shot at me in order to keep me from sitting likely the reason for her solitude. *Jackpot.*

With a sharp chin and wide eyes, a 13 years old Minerva McGonagall almost bared her teeth in a silent growl when I approached despite her deterring tactics. "Excuse me?" she snapped with a whisper accompanied by a frown when I simply sat down.

"Excused." I replied glibly as I started to peruse the contents of my selection of books, "Is it true that you're the next Merlin in Transfiguration?"

My question cut short her half-whispered rant, bringing a dusting of pink on her cheeks before she resumed what would eventually evolve in her distinctive stern expression: "I have neither the time nor the patience to deal with your silly Slytherin stupidity!"

Great alliteration. "What stupidity? You're great at Transfiguration, I'm curious about Transfiguration, sitting here seems outright wise in my opinion."

She scoffed, before narrowing her eyes and looking me over, likely seeing me for the first time instead of using her eyes as an approximation of daggers: "You're that unnaturally large first year." she accused me.

"And you're likely to be the most observant gal around, congratulations." I rolled my eyes while I fingered my wand, focusing on the intended result of my spell. Without further ado, I pointed at my quill and intoned lightly: "Plumaverto."

The string-like filaments of both sides of the central, rigid part of the quill seemed to flow like water one over another, twirling as they assumed a metallic sheen and the object shortened, assuming the more reasonable form of a fountain pen.

I lifted my eyes from my spare parchment in time to see the Scottish witch's surprised expression, "That's..." McGonagall's voice wavered between confusion about the whole situation, disbelief that a first-year could complete such a transfiguration just after a week of lessons, envy because of my inventive, and curiosity now that I had proved myself different from your ordinary Hogwarts student.

With practised ease and enjoying the interested gaze of the witch sitting on the other side of the table, I unscrewed the top of the pen, revealing the hollow side that I had envisioned, and slowly, I poured ink inside, before screwing tightly the top and writing a few squiggly lines in order to get the black liquid running before setting out to draw up a diagram of the fountain pen, that clearly had yet to appear in the Wizarding World, scribbling 'Plumaverto' on one side. Finally, with what I hoped would be received as an amicable smile, I handed over the parchment, which was received with raised eyebrows.

"My name is Rubeus Hagrid." I introduced myself raising my hand in order to shake hers.

"Minerva McGonagall, it's a pleasure." she instinctively replied while she shook my hand. Even then, her eyes never left the parchment, avidly devouring my design: "It's inventive, but you could accomplish a similar result with a self-inking quill."

I stopped her tentative to demean my work with a simple observation: "Refilling Charm. If you practice enough, I imagine you could turn the side of the pen into glass, maybe make it so that it is unstainable so that when the ink starts getting low, you can fill it with a wave of your wand."

"That's sixth-year material..." she frowned, but she stopped trying to dismiss my creation.

I shrugged, ignoring the weak objection. *It has taken me ten hours of practice to turn a quill into a ball fountain pen, I'm fucking proud of it.* "Because like the Gemino Curse it is a form of conjuration?" I tentatively proposed, neatly introducing one of the questions that had been rolling in my head for the past week.

"So," I stated now that I managed to get her attention, "I understand the whole explanation about leveraging symbolism in order to accomplish either a charm or a transfiguration." *Even if Potter was able to learn Muffliato, Levicorpus, Sectumsempra and even the Patronus without the need to think about anything in particular.* I amended the statement in my head, aware that a deep understanding of Magical Theory was actually pretty useless when one actually needed to cast magic.

"Still, I don't actually understand Gamp. The fifth exception in particular." I concluded while tapping on a page.

"It should be noted that while food cannot be outright created from nothing, it can be multiplied if one already has some food to multiply, it can be enlarged or the food can be summoned if one knows the approximate location and is fairly sure the food will still be there." Minerva read from the page I had shoved under her nose, still somewhat frazzled about my whole performance, "In addition, while "good food" cannot be conjured, consumable things such as sauces, wine, and potable water can be, as they are not particularly nutritious substances."

"But creatures can be conjured, can't they? Such as snakes and birds, because it is admittedly easy enough to picture the Ideal Form of a living animal." I countered, and they're clearly more complex than *wine*.

"Leaving alone the fact that conjuring is *extremely* difficult," Minerva's eyes briefly found mine, still disbelieving about the surreality of the whole situation: "and that there is a reason why Duplicating and Refilling Charms are left for N.E.W.T. courses, you'd likely be best served by following the curriculum, before jumping so unbelievably far ahead."

I grimaced at her objection, I didn't want to learn how to make a teacup dance, nevermind turning a beetle into a button or a guinea pig into a fowl, it sounded like a wasteful expenditure of both time and effort: "If I get on par with the theory, shall we be studying together?" I offered the only compromise that I was willing to give.

"You'd think yourself capable of

"It doesn't sound so complex, I've been taught how to turn a matchstick into a needle two days ago, and look what I've managed to do on the spur of the moment."

"The spur of the moment?"

"I may have spent an inordinate amount of time on the design." I conceded her point before returning to my offer: "If I get reasonably on par with fourth-year theory of Transfiguration, will you agree to study together? I have some projects that would welcome your talented approach instead of my silly Slytherin showmanship, and I'm more than likely to prove myself an extraordinary wizard, and I'd like to eventually become friends."

She snorted at the utter lack of modesty I displayed, making me smile sardonically: "Friends?" she arched an unimpressed eyebrow.

I kind of understood her disbelief, I was eleven, she was 13 years old, at that age it sounded like an abyss, but McGonagall was going to be a monster in Transfiguration, and admittedly, the idea of remaining on my lonesome for the whole duration of my stay at Hogwarts sounded kind of... maddeningly.

Sure, Dumbledore looked like a swell guy, but I truly didn't want to risk him painting me with Tom's brush, and that was without thinking about the inherent risk of slipping up near the genius wizard. That ruled him out as a friend until I managed to get on a somewhat equal footing.

Slughorn had an eye for talent, and he was likely to approach me if I managed to realize some of the wild projects I had for potions of various kind. But he was also the professor that saw nothing wrong with talking about Horcruxes with Tom Riddle, so while I was undoubtedly going to use him as much as he was going to use me, I wasn't eager for that.

The only remaining person that could provide something akin to an intelligent exchange, unless I wanted to waste my time by scouring the whole population of Hogwarts, was Tom Riddle. Yeah, that wasn't an option, since I still needed to kill the megalomaniac fucker.

"You'd think yourself capable of catching up..." Minerva stopped her objection when she spotted me twirling the fountain pen I created, "Very well, I agree."

A few hours later, I ended up checking out several books on transfiguration suggested by Minerva, who still made clear that she wasn't going to give me the time of the day unless I proved myself to be actually competent.

This wasn't the world of petty rivalry depicted in the Harry Potter books, the differences were glaringly obvious. Not only for the long-lasting effects caused by both Grindelwald and Voldemort, but very much because of the general mentality of the people. In 1940, respect for your elders and for Institutions was very much a thing.

I was about to reach the common room, where I had every intention of buckling down on Transfiguration for the rest of the day, when a muttered voice behind me gave away the presence of someone else.

A spell sizzled uselessly against my back, making me turn with a frown clearly etched on my features. Behind me, there was a pair of older Slytherin students, likely around 14 years of age, who shared an expression of amusement that quickly turned into one of disbelief when they understood that their first move had utterly failed.

Said expression turned into one of confusion when instead of recoiling in fear, I took a step forward and brandished my own wand: "Expelliarmus!"

I flicked my wrist as I had religiously practised, the image of the Disarming Charm stark clear in my head, followed by another, more subtle twitch of the wand directed at the second student. *Levicorpus*.

"Protego!" the instinctive answer of the first kid came in time to stop the Disarming Charm, but it did not spare his companion, which was suddenly uplifted by his ankle, causing him to let his wand fall as he instinctively tried to bring his hands to protect his face from the floor, which for an instant looked like it was going to smash him on the face.

The first student turned his flabbergasted expression towards his friend just in time to be nailed by another silent *Levicorpus*, that I followed up with another: "Expelliarmus!" confident of the results of my charm.

A few seconds later, I was holding the wands of two very pissed purebloods that had no idea how to free themselves, forced as they were to dangle from their calves, flashing all the corridor with their underwear.

I sighed, considering the situation. *What to do, what to do? I suppose I should be grateful that the bullying of the 'clearly different' first year waited for a whole week.*

"That was very well done." a calm voice that did not belong to a 13 years old kid made me turn where an amused Tom Riddle was looking over the results of the impromptu duel.

Oh fucking hell! I groaned.

AN

I've always imagined that each House has its own dormitory arrangements. So, while it makes sense for Lions and Puffs to share a dormitory, I really cannot see Nobles going from living in a family manor to share a dormitory. While I've always imagined that Ravenclaw would push for single rooms in order to push for self-study.

Charms and Transfiguration Lore:

If you've enjoyed the set up of this Lore (that I will explore and modify to my own preference soon enough), I suggest you read Victoria Potter by Taure.

Potions Lore:

Really, there is no information about canon potions that makes sense. But Potions is an OP skill, of that there is no doubt. Felix Felicis anyone? Draught of Living Death? Polijuce? Skelegrow? Potions can do basically whatever, as long as their maker is competent enough. So I'm actually going to enjoy the challenge of building a Potion-Lore. Snape modified heavily each potion, did he not? The results turned out better, the method more efficient. So I'm building Potioning as a cross between a small ritual and some mysterious shit that requires some innate spark in order to be exploited to the maximum. I strongly suggest everyone that enjoyed that part read The Shadow of Angmar, by Steelbadger.

Sorry about the usually detached recalling of the first lessons, but I needed to somewhat mention those. Still, as you've seen, there will be character interaction in this fic: I promise, but I really cannot force myself to write about an adult chatting with eleven years old as an equal, it just makes no sense whatsoever.

And before you ask, about wandless shit: if both Dumbledore and Voldemort used wands for everything major, I'm not going to turn the MC into a wandless prodigy. Yes, minor things, he'll be able to complete without his holly and phoenix feather wand. But the rest... well, you'll have to read and find out, won't you?

So... thoughts? Suggestions? Hopes?

AN

To the ones telling me to finish Revolution... guys, Revolution is my main focus, along with The Age of Men, so I'm forcing myself to complete a chapter for one of those two fics every time I write a chapter for my minor fics, such as 'Opening the Eyes of God', 'Meddling Giant', etc. I've updated several chapters of The Age of Men in the past weeks in order to be free to build a bit in this fic.

So... suck it up. I'm going to finish everything (besides Unbound, but that fic is my exception, you know that), I promise.

"That was very well done." a calm voice that did not belong to a 13 years old kid made me turn where an amused Tom Riddle was looking over the results of the impromptu duel.

Oh, fucking hell! *I groaned.*

Rising Star

I ignored the frothing-at-the-mouth teenagers that I had swiftly incapacitated in order to study Tom Riddle: high cheekbones, dark eyes and flowy black hair. I could understand how he would grow up to be charming, but for now, he still held the gangly, uncomfortable appearance of someone that had just got started on puberty.

Distractedly, I loosened my tie before resuming my walk towards the common room, the wands of my impromptu opponents held loosely in my hand: "You could have helped, you know?"

"It didn't look like you needed it." came the smooth reply, "Aren't you going to..." he nodded towards the still screaming teens, suggesting that I took a measure of revenge for their attack.

I rolled my eyes, I wasn't going to punch around teenagers only because they were dumb. *Even if I'm going to kill this particular 13 years old.* I grimaced as my resolve showcased my hypocrisy, choosing instead to answer Tom's enquiry: "I was thinking about placing the wands on the mantel of the main fireplace, even if someone different than a professor manages to get them down, they'll still need to recover their wands in front of everyone."

"A power play." Tom's eyebrows rose on his forehead, "You're not like your everyday eleven years old wizard, are you?"

Fuck. I shrugged: "What did give it away? My height? My non-verbal charm?"

"The fact that their first Petrificus Totalus didn't affect you at all. But yes, the non-verbal magic is *quite* advanced, I take it that you've received previous teachings? I've never heard of a spell to hang people by their ankles." the slithering Slytherin inquired.

"I've got a protective charm on me, such a low-level thing would hardly affect me." I shrugged off his first question, rapidly thinking about how to approach my clearly extraordinary skill. On one hand, proving myself extraordinary could make Tom see me as a potential threat, but as 13 years old, I was temporarily safe. On the other hand, he *may* try to take me 'under his wing', and I would be more than capable of sliding a knife between his ribs.

He knew jack shit about my life, so I could sell away my skill by talking about a previous teacher. The problem was... I didn't *want* to. I wanted my accomplishments to be mine, I couldn't care less about the opinion of the World about my actions, but my skill and power... I wanted to be respected for it. I wanted to make it clear that I wasn't just another wizard. I was going to flip the world on its ear, and a part of me *wanted* confirmation.

That I deserved to be here.

That I was up to the challenge.

That I was here to *stay*. And fuck the rest.

"I sort of hammered together a variation of Impedimenta and Tripping Jinx." I bullshitted Tom, taking a deep breath before going ahead: "And I don't understand the difference between verbal and not-verbal. To be truthful, I hardly understand the punny or blatantly wrong Latin for incantations, but I guess I'm here to learn."

By then we had reached the Common Room where Tom waited for a few seconds before following me, letting the common rabble of students quiet down and look me with wide eyes as I dropped the two wands of my attackers on the mantelpiece of the largest fireplace.

I then seated down at the table where a marble chessboard was waiting, casually setting up a new game before picking up my extremely advanced Transfiguration books. I wasn't a genius at chess, to be truthful, it was a pretty linear game, which tended to be too slow to be enjoyable. Now, the Bullet games were much more interesting: a couple of minutes for performing your whole match.

Soon enough, Tom sat in front of me, eyeing my books with a quirked eyebrow before fingering his black king, showing a sharp smile that I couldn't know if it was real or not.

I wondered if Riddle was aware of the implication of him seating in front of me right after my defeat of an older couple of students. For now, it didn't look like he was the top dog in Slytherin, I guessed that it was more because of his age than because of his skill. No matter how good, no adult wants to listen to a kid that can show you up.

"Do you play?" he asked, hopefully oblivious to my thoughts.

"I prefer timed matches." I retorted while I started skimmed my selection of books: "If you can set up a minute worth of hourglass for each of us, with sand flowing only when it is my or your turn, then we can have a match."

And just like Minerva had challenged me after I had already started to impress her, I found myself setting up a condition through which Tom could prove himself worthy. I suppressed a grimace when I realized what my casual reply did. *Questioning his worth is a sure way to have him do something, but it will also make him see me like someone that looks down on him.*

Befriending psychos was hard, who could have guessed?

I started casually skimming the principles regarding the transfiguration of living beings, trying to reconcile it with the admittedly limited knowledge I had about Transfiguration.

Long-winded chess matches, not professionally at least, were generally won in virtue of the computational skills of a player coupled with the concept of 'wearing down' the opponent, piece after piece. Bullet games were instead a balance of aggressivity and timing. Generally, the first 5 to ten moves were executed through rote memorization: getting the horses on the field, opening avenues for the bishops to strike, controlling the centre of the chessboard with your pawns, and more often than not castling in order to set up a defence.

So I watched with the corner of my eyes, with disguised amazement, as Tom frowned in concentration and pulled out his pale wand.

With a muttered 'accio', which I'm sure he pronounced more to my benefit than out of real necessity, a couple of pawns from a free chessboard were summoned to our location, squawking outraged by the sheer gall of the 13 years old Slytherin, before he muted them with a distracted 'silencio'.

For a few seconds, Riddle seemed to still as he looked them over. Then he quietly waved over them with his yew wand, and I stared openly as the pieces elongated themselves, the marble they were made of

flowing like water on their sides in order to showcase an eight-like shape of glass. After a couple of muttered incantations, with a tap over the head of the two small hourglasses, white and black sand fell in its respective hourglass, stilling in the upper side.

In the end, the two pawns, which had originally kept glaring daggers at Riddle, had gone from being a couple of crouched infantrymen behind kite shields, to two hand-spans tall hourglasses, one in white and one in black, with helmed heads that were still glaring outrageously at Riddle.

I stopped pretending to study in order to follow as closely as I could the next part. Transfiguring was easy enough, the fundamental principle was something that I had grasped successfully, and everything that followed was a mere consequence. Making it so that the sand would run only at the opportune time was not so simple, and entered a field that I hadn't yet met: enchanting.

Sure, charming a feather to float was technically 'enchanting', for it added a property to the feather that it naturally didn't have. But it was a 'direct' approach, very much like a colour changing charm. Making it so an object would retain a certain mechanism or magic was a whole different kettle of fish, at least in my admittedly uninformed opinion.

His eyes met mine then, and he openly smirked before simply touching the top of the black hourglass and the head of the black king with his wand, before repeating the process with the white pieces.

Little motherfucker. I cursed mentally at him: by doing everything silently and without movement of the wand that I could see, he had effectively stopped me from learning something new.

"Would you like a match?" he repeated with a sly attitude that screamed 'yeah, I kept what you wanted to see hidden, we both now it, deal with it'.

Or maybe I'm just fucking annoyed by this little shit. I frowned before moving my queen pawn ahead of two spaces, spying the white sand in my hourglass as it flowed for an instant, stopping immediately when my piece landed in its box.

"Pawn B6." he answered with a frown, and my eyes widened as I saw his sand fail to flow at all.

I moved without thinking, following my usual routine. *If you give the order the sand doesn't move? I had forgotten that the chessboards were alive!*

"Bishop B5."

"Knight F3." I caught up with his method and stared pleased as the grain of sands didn't move from their place in my hourglass.

My eyes found Riddle's briefly before I returned my full attention to the game, my lips twitching upwards. *This will be fun until I figure a way to kill this little fucker.*

I didn't know when bullet chess actually got started, because I only knew that computers started to consistently win against humans in 1997, that was yet another useless bit of trivia that was even more useless now than it was in my previous life. The annoying part, was that Riddle played like he was used to such fast-paced matches, which, given his brief frown when I had spoken about 'one minute match', was bullshit. Pure and simple.

"If you wanted to learn how to enchant, you would be better served by asking directly." he casually pointed out at the end of the first game, in which he somewhat stole a draw.

I'm going to strangle him. I sighed, reining in my instinctive answer.

Who knew that planning the death of a 13 years old wizard would come so instinctively to me?

Three weeks after the beginning of term, Horace Slughorn, Master Potioneer, Professor of Potions, Head of House Slytherin, and general hedonist, walked at his own pace in a scantily illuminated Hogwarts, his ears peeled and his eyes charmed to pick up, even in the dark, the presence of students out after curfew, while his mind freely roamed from one consideration to another. *It wouldn't do to reveal my position with a Lumos now, would it?*

He greatly enjoyed flexing his networking skills. It wasn't like he actually needed those, because at this point in life, he was a reasonably powerful wizard, and if he ever started producing potions to sell could live quite comfortably.

He didn't need powerful friends in order to live a life of luxury. But the act of handpicking the brightest of each generation, helping them when they were young and directionless, forestalling the privileges that would come when those pupils started to actually shine in the wider world. He enjoyed boasting of his 'friends' all over the world, he loved the respect and veiled, oblique power that came with having the ear of so many people, and he luxuriated in the simple joys of life.

Nicking a few leaves from the greenhouses here and there, occasionally 'helping' the Professor of Care of Magical Creatures and thusly ending up with free and fresh ingredients. Reselling the, admittedly few, perfect potions that his students managed to brew. Receiving thanks in a multitude of forms throughout each day of his life.

He even enjoyed the occasional detention, a somewhat mean habit of his, but students somewhat were justly served by receiving a little hard talking to. And if he used such occasion to see if the bombastic student had a hidden talent in this or that branch of Magic... well, it was a good thing for everyone, wasn't it?

Horace had spotted the bright intellect of Tom Riddle within his first month at Hogwarts, and the Professor had been since then overjoyed to spy the constant, quiet inquisitive of the talented youth, often wondering if that was what Albus' professors had felt when they taught him.

Oddities happened, here and there, magic wouldn't be so if it didn't come with its small quirks, after all, and while somewhat Horace 'bent' a little his rules and helped along with this or that Heir in order to keep friendly ties with the next generation of Lords, he was very aware that he shouldn't expect another like Tom Riddle for the rest of his tenure in Hogwarts.

Horace huffed as he strolled across the dark halls of Hogwarts, forcing himself to complete his patrol despite the general distaste he felt for such occupation. That was the very reason why Prefects were made, in his opinion at least. Letting young wizards and witches to freely roam at night was an obvious recipe for disaster, that he knew, but it didn't mean that he would enjoy having to wake up before dawn. Sure, he could attend to some potions that were better treated at night that way, or just before breakfast, but it was still murder on his sleep cycle.

Oh well, the Head of Slytherin House sighed, *nothing a small dose of Sleeping Draught cannot quickly adjust*. With another annoyed sound, he started to climb the Astronomy Tower, quickly falling back into his self-reflection and inane musings about his life, appreciative of the results he had got thus far.

He hadn't dare hope to ever meet another pupil of Tom's calibre, until that uncannily tall first year came along. *Rubeus Hagrid*. The image of the unreasonably tall Slytherin appeared clear in his mind: shaggy dark hair and a generally unkempt fashion, accompanied by black eyes that seemed ready to devour every snippet of magic he found interesting, failing to hide his sharp mind.

Besides his generally unruly behaviour in class, at least going by what Horace's colleagues muttered from time to time, he was undeniably gifted. No, gifted was not the correct word: he assimilated the principles behind the working of Magic just as fast as he encountered them. Such understanding was clear in all of his essays, which seamlessly brought together different Branches of Magic.

Why, just the week before Horace had the occasion to read one of his Astronomy essays, in which Mr. Hagrid had managed to use the symbolism inherent of Charms in order to showcase why the phases of the Moon were capable of influencing a Potion.

If only he could write essays of the required length. The Potions Professor mused, a soft smile curling upwards his lips. *For all of his insight, he doesn't seem to be willing to spend any time more than strictly necessary on his essays. He can be awfully concise, and he doesn't bother polishing his coursework.*

Perhaps it was understandable, the first year was clearly annoyed by the slow pacing of the coursework, and thusly was unwilling to spend much time on topics that he felt he had easily understood. What was unusual was his general disinterest in his grades, which never dipped below Acceptable.

When professor Farsee had required Rubeus to write an essay of the proper length, lest he received a failing mark, the cheeky first year simply added a drawing of the mechanism explained in the first half of the parchment, not seeing any need to expand on his words.

Horace kept huffing on the staircase until he reached the very top, shaking slightly his head at the few aversion wards that washed ineffectively over his disciplined mind: "Dear me, I hope I'm not interrupting..." he started to speak as he opened the door to the top of Hogwarts' tallest tower, expecting to be crashing a secret meeting between randy teenagers, only to be met by something completely different.

His casually jovial opening, designated to increase the embarrassment of whoever he spotted, fell into silence while his eyes took in the top of the tower.

The stone platform had been freed from the stools and wooden planes over which the students leaned upon in order to chart the skies, and despite the lack of moon in the sky, the light of the stars seemed to shine just a bit too much for it to be natural, showing a memorable student that had been occupying Horace's most recent thoughts.

Calmly seated on an enlarged stool, one Rubeus Hagrid was slowly but constantly stirring a rather large iron cauldron, bluebell flames calmly shimmering between the cauldron and the stone floor, and a wide, curved shape of glass hovering just above the potion.

The student's eyes jumped up at the interruption, but he didn't stop his movements: "Good night for a stroll, professor? Even if we're almost at dawn." he tilted his head toward the East, where the sky was starting to abandon the black of the night to become deep blue, slowly but surely tilting towards purple.

"Mr. Hagrid!" Horace stepped forward after having closed the door, conflicted between reprimanding the first year and expressing his curiosity about his student's endeavour.

"I've thought a lot about our first lesson, professor." Hagrid spoke without giving the Head of Slytherin a chance to answer: "And I've asked myself, can I use one story as an ingredient for another, greater one?"

"Using a potion in order to enhance another is possible only in a handful of cases. Poisons, for the most part." Horace strode forward with an interested gleam in his eyes, quickly undoing the charm that allowed him to see in the dark in order to discern the situation without magic to mess with his refined potion maker's senses.

"That's what I had thought too at first, but then I rethought about the whole 'Story' concept you showcased for us." Hagrid's eyes remained pointed East, like he was waiting for something, "And it makes sense, a Story doesn't need another in order to be 'complete', then I thought about the refining of ingredients, and what it could signify."

"And?" Horace prodded, his hands held behind his back, forcing himself to not interfere with a potion he could tell was not going to be harmful anytime soon. *Once he's done we'll have a stern talk about the risk of experimental potions.* He decided, postponing the more obvious reaction to a student blatantly ignoring the rules in order to satisfy his own curiosity.

"And if a single ingredient can be refined, I don't see why a small 'Story' cannot be brewed in order to obtain a very specific sum of properties." the tallest first year to ever grace Hogwarts' halls explained: "A story that is nothing more than a 'definition' of sorts."

"What did you do?"

"Well, I started with the idea of capturing sunlight in a liquid." he gestured with his head towards a thick stack of papers that Horace grabbed delicately, "But then I thought, 'Go Big or Go Home', and decided to capture 'Dawnbreak' itself."

"You used mostly Fungi here." the Head of Slytherin House observed, receiving a nod as an answer. Then the professor finally glanced inside of the cauldron, seeing only what looked like the uppermost layer of an impossibly deep well, which nevertheless seemed to shimmer softly when he observed it with the corner of his eye.

"I needed something to act as 'containment for the dawn break, you see. So I've chosen an iron cauldron, to act as a cage. But then I needed to turn the simple iron into something capable to not only withstand but contain the first ray of sun. Hence the Dark Amanita, desiccated and ground..."

"Because it grows best in dark environments?"

"Yes!" the first year smiled widely at the professor, "and goes into some sort of hibernation when exposed to direct light. So I lined the inside of the cauldron with it, using only a little water to turn it into a paste. Then extract of Nyx's Delight, and limestone dust to coat the pine branch I'm using to stir clockwise."

"Because you want the mesh to happen orderly? Following the natural motion of time?"

"Exatcly, I'll only add one counterclockwise stir before the last passage, in order to turn the potion into a 'reactive' state of sorts."

"Seven leaves of White Ivy? Which instead thrives with sunlight? And no less than 21 Lustre Bat's eyes. I see you modified the bluebell charm too?" the Head of Slytherin inquired, only to receive a sly smile in return.

"Well, yeah, the Ivy will keep the cauldron from exploding, the bat's eyes instead I've added one per minute since the sunset. A Lustre Bat's eye symbolizes the animal's ability to roam the dark, to capture even the faintest direction. Even if biologically speaking, normal bats use echolocation, not sight, and that threw me for a loop." Hagrid's eyes seemed to shine in the dark with unrepressed glee, "The eyes are to capture the starlight, you see, I needed starlight in order to actually prepare the cauldron."

"Like a muggle smith warming the iron before striking it with a hammer, I'd guess?" Horace found himself captivated by the extremely original line of thought that had brought the first year to spend the whole night tending to an experimental potion for which, he could readily admit, he had performed an incredible amount of research.

Even if the importance of the timing and the importance of Astronomy for the brew pointed towards Ritualism a bit more than Horace would have wished for a First-Year, there was no denying the brilliance or the sheer ambition of the project.

"More or less, it was also to prepare the glass, it will be the 'epilogue' of the story, just after the dawn, you'll see. As for the bluebell flames... I've lit an ember with the last ray of sunset, and only then I've cast the bluebell flames."

Before Horace could keep questioning him, the tall first year shook his head.

"Now's the moment." Rubeus Hagrid suddenly stood from his stool, retreating the straight and freshly pruned pine branch that he had been using to stir his concoction, and placing himself with the cauldron between him and the imminent dawn.

"If you blink, you'll miss it." he warned with a suppressed bout of laughter.

The Sky had lost his pitch like darkness, turning into shades of purple and pink that seemed to punch clean through a small cluster of clouds, and the eyes immediately burned as they were pointed exactly

where the sun was about to surface. With a cautious movement of his wand, Hagrid tilted the curved glass above the cauldron until it rested with its centre pointed exactly towards the incoming rising star.

When finally the sun poked up from beyond the horizon, for a single instant, nothing changed.

The shadows remained still, the stars didn't disappear, the colours of the sky didn't change, and the warmth of the favourite star of the planet didn't wash over the two wizards.

Instead, the curved glass glinted impossibly in the dim light that came just before the actual dawn, and the dark pit of water present in the cauldron shone with the same impossible bright light of the dawn break, casting upwards a funnel of white warmth that shattered what was left of the night, accompanied by a wooshing sound caused by air being displaced by the change in temperature.

"Here comes in effect the powdered limestone, to bleed off the warmth." Then the curved shape of glass tilted backwards and fell into what had once been the dark water of the cauldron, which now shone of a pale gold, the shimmer over the water looking like the glinting of sunlight over polished silver, and only then the bluebell flames were extinguished.

Horace slowly lowered the wand that he had raised in order to be able to defend himself and his student with a moment's notice, and looked at the final result with blatant awe. It wasn't an excessively complex potion, only one that required a lot of constant care, and it wasn't surprising, after all it wasn't something to be consumed in order to grant properties of any kind upon the drinker.

"It will be either a powerful agent to kick off a much larger reaction, or a veritable flash of actual sunlight, and a concentrated one at that." Horace mused with eyes that shone with interest as he went over the detailed notes of his now favourite first year.

"I was thinking that in a pinch it could kill a vampire." Hagrid laughed, and if he had looked a bit unhinged for a moment, Slughorn missed it completely, busy as he was with ogling the 'liquid dawn breaks, "If I used 'Reducio' on the cauldron, would it concentrate the dawn break even further? No, it wouldn't make sense. But what if instead, I had turned into a liquid the light from an instant of the midsummer sun?"

"It would be far more likely." Horace replied distractedly, finally finding again his proper role, "I guess we can talk more about this during your detention for being out after curfew and experimenting with an original potion without a professor to oversee. And also for stealing ingredients, those eyes were worth a pretty galleon, I'll have you know!"

The annoyed groan of the tall student brought a smile to Horace's face. Mr. Hagrid was unusual in many ways, from his size to his attitude, and he wouldn't fail to entertain any time soon.

AN

I hoped I managed to make the interaction MC-Tom organic. Not many words, but they're measuring each other for now.

Dumbledore showed Harry memories of a cruel little kid that lashed out consistently in order to make himself untouchable. Nobody knows how his first years at Hogwarts were, but I'm guessing that a muggle raised half-blood in Slytherin didn't have it easy. And that's without keeping track of the language barrier: I assure you, during WW II, in an orphanage you don't learn how to talk posh English, which I'm thinking was the standard for proper purebloods.

I'm not good enough to use English in order to showcase the different social classes, I have great difficulties with even setting up accents, so don't lynch me for this.

Anyway, Tom felt special because he was a wizard, and thusly discarded the muggles. Then he was likely knocked down one peg or twenty when he realized that even as talented as he was, older wizards could just randomly set his shit on fire in order to scare him into compliance.

Now, the talented 3rd year Tom Riddle spots a first-year Slytherin that casually fucks up the ritual hazing that all slightly different students undergo when in a new place (again, Tom likely has been somewhat bullied in his first year at least).

And our future Dark Lord is left thinking: is he like me? Can he accept such a thought even he wants to be unique? The MC sure doesn't seem to consider the option of 'redeeming' Riddle. Tom immediately shifts to the forma mentis that will have him lead his gaggle of purists wannabe in later years, and decides to get Hagrid on his boat, or at least to know him enough to determine if he's a threat or not.

I don't think that 13 years old kids plan the takeover of a country. That's just... psycho genius or not... it doesn't make sense to me. Take over of Slytherin, or even the school, that's a bit far stretched, but ultimately ok: 13 y.o. kids don't plan revolutions or conquests. For now, his vision is focused on what happens in his immediate surroundings: namely Hogwarts. In the next years, he'll start thinking about the larger world, but that's yet to happen.

That's to say that Riddle is difficult to peg down, sorry the ramble.

And while we'll be soon seeing the MC's POV on potion Making, I wanted to place a Horace moment. Did it work?

Anyway, I hope you've enjoyed this chapter! Opinions?

I was toying with the idea of tossing in a random 'Triwizard Tournament' after the war, in order to promote 'unity' and whatnot. Opinions? It would likely land in 1946-47 which is Hagrid's 7th year. Convenient, is it not? WW2 basically ends with Hiroshima and Nagasaki, 6th and 7th August respectively, and Dumbledore defeats Grindelwald in the same year, I'm guessing a little after the bombs land. So one year to organize, and the following one to execute it.

Ideas?

Parallelism

"Cursing is much easier than enchanting, even if technically they're one and the same." Riddle explained as I twirled one of the hourglasses we habitually used for our matches in my hands, "the easier method to enchant an object is through..."

"Runes." I guessed, interrupting him before he could show off even more than he already did. I looked around the mostly empty Great Hall, making sure that we weren't been overheard. It was a Saturday, and most students were sleeping in until they could hop to Hogsmeade.

I guess that all the muggle-borns will remain here during the holidays. I grimaced as I remembered, not for the first time, that WWII was in full swing.

Tom Riddle lowered his book about Ancient Runes, in order to take a sip from his tea. Once he put down his cup, he simply stared at me, arching an eyebrow while he nodded, confirming my speculation about Runes.

"Well, I could guess that much on my own." I explained my reasoning: "The first lesson of Charms was about symbolism, and the first one of Transfiguration was all about Ideal-Forms, which is something we refer to through symbols. Enchanting, charming, cursing, call it however you like, it sounds more and more like you're 'imprinting' a combination of Ideas on an object."

"I don't know if your approach is simplistic or if the school made this more complex than it needed to be."

"A bit of both I suppose." and I grinned at the frown on Riddle's face: "You can't think of a single reason why in a world where knowledge is power the government would make sure to set hard limits to what wizards and witches *think* they're capable of? Besides, the very respectable Purebloods could hardly lord their ancient grimoires upon the less fortunate if everyone could figure them out through trial and error."

"You're saying that 'trial and error' is... what exactly?... outlawed and that we are subtly influenced towards not even trying?"

"You tell me." I shrugged, "I find it curious that something as aleatory as magic is strictly separated into categories. Charms, Transfigurations, Curses, Potions. And what about the fact that there isn't a single class about making up your own magic?" I tilted my head as I curiously studied Tom. He had been... well, not invaluable, but useful. Cramming through years of Transfiguration theory was exhausting, but from time to time I managed to needle Riddle enough to receive a tip that spared me hours of headaches.

Sure, he did it only because he had heard about the true nature of my 'detentions' with Slughorn, and because I let him copy my recipe for 'Dawnbrew', which was the official name for my liquid dawn break. It was an exchange of sorts. I found the whole situation hilarious. I distractedly planned Tom's death, and he would one day end up killing me unless I stopped him first. At the same time, I chose to stay close to him because he was extra-useful for my studies, and he was doing the same.

The parallelism was hard to ignore.

"Advanced Arithmancy can be used to predict the effect of..."

"Yeah, but Arithmancy comes with a bucketload of rules, doesn't it? Math is useful if you're building something that needs to follow a set of rules, namely Physics." I interrupted him once my attention was returned to the conversation.

Riddle grimaced at the mention of muggles, and a sly smile fell upon my features: "What, don't like muggles?"

Before he could answer, a fluttering of wings announced the arrival of owls carrying mail. The surprise was great when one landed near us at the Slytherin table, its orange eyes fixed on me.

With a frown, I freed its leg from the letter he was carrying, and I briefly read the shaggy script on the outside. *Who the hell would write to me?*

"Are you going to Hogsmeade today?" I asked Tom, who was busy appearing uninterested by burying his nose into his book.

"I'd better get going before the crowd swarms the village." he answered while he rose from his seated position, a slight frown on his face. He was obviously conflicted between roaming a magical village on his own and poking his nose into my affairs, maybe looking for some leverage to use against me.

It was the 26th of October 1940, we were nearing my first All Hallows' Eve in Hogwarts. I spent almost two months at Hogwarts, occasionally chatting with Tom Riddle, and I would soon enough attempt to bring Minerva McGonagall into the fold, all the while enjoying my 'detentions' with Slughorn. To be blunt, I generally lived fucking around with magic.

While I accompanied Tom to the Hogwart's entrance that led towards the village, I was holding the letter in my hand with trembling fingers, and a feeling like bile rising up from my stomach.

After I watching Tom trickle along with other students to Hogsmeade, likely to spend what they could in preparation of All Hallows' Eve, which would fall on Wednesday during the next week, I returned into the castle, not bothering hiding my heavy frown.

I had been thinking about magic, not really focusing on my preventive mission of killing Tom, deciding that it would be much easier to simply break his neck in the summer and toss him somewhere during the bombing of London. And to my great dismay, I had somewhat forgotten that shit was going around beyond the stone walls of Hogwarts.

In particular, I had completely forgotten that Hagrid had a father.

I walked briskly across the mostly empty halls of the school, ignoring the words written on the parchment. *It's not my fault I've taken Hagrid's place.*

But even while I was thinking that, and I actually believed it, it was undeniable that the small wizard that had guided me through Diagon Alley not only believed me to be his son, but he had already, effectively since my decision to actually grasp this second chance at life with all of me, lost Hagrid completely. I had no idea about the experiences that the original me had shared with his family, no measure of love for the minute wizard.

And I didn't *want* to. I didn't want to feel any sort of twisted obligation towards someone that I effectively didn't know. I didn't want to be... Rubeus Hagrid. Not as he was. There is nothing wrong with being a kind, if dumb, soul. What I knew of the character was hilarious for the most part, but... I wanted to be *me*.

And I could hardly do that by pretending to be Rubeus. Or, better yet, I could, but I felt like shit already because of the effective death of original me's personality, which effectively had robbed Hagrid Senior of his son, the idea of stringing the absent-minded wizard along was... *necessary?*

I gritted my teeth in distaste as I finally reached the 7th floor of the castle and started looking around, the unread letter still clutched in my hand. I needed a drink. I needed a drink *Badly*.

It was almost ironic stumbling upon the Room of Requirement in my mental state, but if there was something that I knew for sure, was that Fate didn't lack in irony.

The Room of Requirement appeared to me like a long stone hall, with cauldrons lined up on one wall, countless books on wooden shelves, and an impressive sequence of cruets and ampoules.

Might as well learn how to brew my alcohol, I'm sure as hell going to need it. I thought with a shuddering breath as I dropped 'my father's letter on the nearest bench, letting once more the wonder for magic take me over so that I could ignore the very real problem that wasn't going to disappear with a wave of my wand.

I could even loot the room of hidden things before Tom uses it to hide... My mind spluttered and my thought died down before I could open the first book about brewing alcoholic beverages.

"He hasn't recovered the diadem yet." I spoke out loud, my eyes staring unseeingly into the Room.

I have a concrete objective now. I nodded to myself. That Tom would end up a Dark Lord was impossible, since I was going to kill him in this or the following summer at the latest. But in any case, a priceless artefact that nobody knew anything about was somewhere in a forest in Albania, ready for the taking. Nobody would hunt me if I succeeded, and whatever enchantment it held, it should make any and all my efforts in learning magic much easier.

Minerva McGonagall was a proud Gryffindor witch. Singularly talented in the field of Transfiguration, and extremely capable in all of her subjects at the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, she was curious and had a temper that matched her Scottish roots. She forced herself to suppress her instinctive Gaelic insults when her temper rose, and carefully chose her words in order to not let out her Scottish blur when she spoke.

Minerva McGonagall was a no-nonsense person, and thusly she tended to ignore both the rumour mill and any other insult that did not reach her ears directly. Sure, when she was provoked, she didn't hesitate to make her stand clear, either by trading insults with her dimwitted opponents or by her wand.

Yet, she remembered how the school had talked about her in her first year, and she had been righteously proud of that. Then, in her second year she heard the same talks about another 'prodigy', this time a first-year Slytherin. And with that turn of the rumour mill, she stopped paying attention to whispers about 'supremely talented' students, realizing that there was one in every year.

At the end of the first week, after she had managed to settle into a tentative rhythm now that she had to follow the directions of the new Quidditch Captain, and only after she had prepared a study plan in order to be ready for the O.W.L.s the following year, she had allowed herself to read the first topic that caught her interest in the Library. From time to time, she found relaxing to sit in the quiet of the Library, enjoying her research and the almost 'holy' ambience of the vast hall. The smell of books, the creaking of parchment, the heavy presence of the wooden shelves.

When her solitude was broken by a pesky first-year, and Slytherin at that, she had no intention whatsoever to let him associate with her. Then, while he showcased a skill that most certainly didn't belong with someone of his age bracket, she remembered that the rumour mill of the school was already aflame with mentions of yet another prodigy.

Minerva McGonagall was easily the most talented witch of her year. But she didn't let that little tidbit of information go to her head, there were many others just as talented, if not more, than her. In fact, she had in insight realized that there was a 'best student' of the year *every year*. And that had killed much of the hype in her eyes.

Still, that didn't mean that she was letting an eleven-year-old *child* hang around her coattails just because she had once been in his shoes. He had looked her up specifically for her skill with transfiguration, it was obvious with his blatant praise of her skill, but she didn't have time to waste. She had reached the top on her own, if the unnaturally tall kid wanted the same, he could use his own two legs to walk that path.

So, she casually distracted him from his silly Slytherin scam by promising what he wanted in exchange for him to not slow her down. Which, considering the years she had on him, was an obstacle impossible to pass.

"This is a waste of time." the exasperated hiss came from just beyond the row of shelves, only to be dismissed by a nonchalant snort.

Minerva blinked, trying to figure out where she had already heard that particular voice, which seemed to have lost its usually smooth veneer in order to turn scathing.

"It's not. Besides, if I didn't drag you around in order to experiment a bit, you'll never make any friends." the quiet tenor of the eleven-year-old Slytherin that Minerva had sent chasing the end of the rainbow in order to be left alone sounded across the shelves.

"I don't need *friends!*"

Minerva's lips turned down when she understood that the voices were sounding closer and closer to her usual spot in the library, and her brow furrowed since she hadn't actually considered what would happen if the talented first-year actually took her up on her challenge and barreled through the theory of the first 4 years of Transfiguration.

"Nobody is born to be alone." the reprimand came in a rumbling tone that did nothing to hide the amusement that Minerva knew was shining into Hagrid's eyes, which were likely to shine even brighter when the other Slytherin muttered some uncomplimentary words under his breath.

Preposterous. Since their first meeting at the end of the first week, in which she had admittedly been fascinated by the cerebral application of transfiguration, Rubeus Hagrid hadn't bothered her even once. She had hoped that using his own pride against him would be enough to be left alone. Never she had actually considered the possibility that a *first-year* could catch up with her, never mind in... *less than three months?*

"Spare me your bottom-of-the-bottle wisdom, Hagrid."

"I'll have you know that at the bottom of *my* bottles there is much more than conventional wisdom, thank you very much." the lower voice turned almost taunting then, "I'm still envious of your surname by the way. 'Riddle' sounds much more wizardry than 'Hag-Rid'. What the hell is my surname supposed to mean? Does it indicate some sort of occupation of a clan long lost? Did my forefathers hunt hags as a sport? It's demeaning."

"Well, hello Minerva!" a not so hushed whisper made the witch raise her head with exasperation already written on her face.

Her lips thinned into a single line when she spotted the owner of the voice, and if possible, they thinned, even more, when her eyes landed on the other wizard that accompanied the unusually large first-year Slytherin. *Oh no, now there are actually two of them.*

A tall stack of books was casually dropped on one side of the table, not making a sound. Minerva's eye caught the flash of a white wand being holstered once more by the hands of a well known third year, who was rolling his eyes at Hagrid's carelessness: "Try to not get us thrown out of the Library by mistreating the tomes."

The reprimand was grossly ignored. "Well, allow me to introduce you two!" the not-so-hushed whisper came with a beaming smile from Hagrid: "Tom Riddle, this is..."

"Miss McGonagall," Riddle cut off his companion with a stiff nod, "I'm aware."

"You know each other?" Hagrid's question caused Minerva to huff in irritation.

Of course, they knew each other. Or at least, of course, she *knew* of Tom Riddle. The only third-year allowed into the Slug-Club, where he conducted himself with a brilliance that left people looking for an important ancestry. Not that she enjoyed the Slug-Club whatsoever, she tried to avoid it anytime she could, brow-nosing and boot-licking obviously wasn't for her.

But she couldn't always say *no*. Lest she offended Professor Slughorn, and not stepping on the toes of her elders was only reasonable.

The third-year capable of O.W.L. level magic was known. That the younger years looked up to him was known. Even that his features had caused more than a few crushes here and there.

"Oh! I guess that Slughorn couldn't leave talented people alone." Hagrid initially confused rumble turned in a snort, while Minerva pursed her lips again, turning them into something almost invisible.

"Professor Slughorn." she corrected him.

"That's what I just said." the far too large first-year blatantly lied as he sat down at *her* table, slowly followed by his companion.

"I apologize for his rudeness." Riddle inclined his head towards the Gryffindor witch in an empty gesture of platitude.

At least one of the two has the good grace to attempt to be courteous. Minerva thought sardonically.

"Bah, we've got no time to waste on formalities." Hagrid's large hand waved irritably in the air: "Sorry if it took so long to get to 4th year Transfiguration, but we got sidetracked with enchanting."

"You got sidetracked with everything your eyes landed upon, I swear you're a Ravenclaw." Riddle sniped at the first-year, who shrugged unrepentantly.

"You had some catching up to do too"

"I most certainly did *not*."

"We both know that you wouldn't be near me if you didn't find my approach to magic interesting." Hagrid snorted dismissively, returning his attention to the Gryffindor witch.

During that exchange, Minerva's eyes landed on the stack of books, and her eyebrows rose into her forehead: "Animagus? You want to become an Animagus?"

"I want to research *how* it's done." Hagrid shook his head while Riddle's lips curled in distaste: "I have no interest in becoming an animal."

"And it's largely useless unless you have a form that makes you capable of blending in, like a tabby cat." Hagrid nodded his assent, "And distinctive signs carry over with the transformation, so whatever animal I'd end up being would be too large to be natural."

"Can we get on with it without having to listen to your rambling?" Riddle redirected the conversation before Minerva had a chance to protest. *Becoming an Animagus is extremely difficult, and the magic is fascinating! How dare they dismiss it so easily?*

"Does this tome come from the Restricted Section?" Minerva asked while she flipped open a leather-bound tome titled *The Shape Within*. She had never found it in her previous casual attempt to learn something about the Animagus Magic.

"Sluggy does *so* love a driven student."

"Professor Slughorn." Riddle corrected the far too tall student with a tired sigh, letting Minerva free to have her eager eyes roam over the pages.

"An Animagus can turn into a single animal form without a wand or other instruments, retaining his wits despite the obvious inability of the animal to house a human brain. My first question is this: where do the wizard's clothes go when he's an animal?" Hagrid's voice made Minerva's head tilt towards the two wizards that had boldly invaded her private space.

"That's why you want to study this? You want... what exactly? A personal pocket only you can reach?" Riddle's expression went from one politely hiding irritation to pure *eagerness*. His head snapping towards the stack of books like they held the key to everything he had ever wanted.

"I knew that you'd be interested. Minerva is a genius at Transfiguration and does well all across the board, you're... well, *you*, and my approach to magic is almost always new. This friendship will bring us far."

Minerva's eyes snapped up at the mention of friendship while Riddle was suddenly busy skimming the books, his eyes moving quickly from one line to another.

"Does your presence here imply that you have covered four years of Transfiguration theory in less than three months?" she asked, suddenly remembering the condition she had placed in order to free herself from being pestered by the first-year Slytherin.

"Understanding the theory and *doing* are two different things. My mind grasps concepts faster than most, and Tom's brilliance can hardly be denied. He pointed me in the right direction the few times I've stumbled. But in my defence, studying only theory makes it challenging to understand everything without having confirmation from my spells."

"He makes the most beautiful daggers out of needles." Riddle, no, *Tom* commented as he turned a page, his eyes never stopping from seeking anything worthy of note.

Minerva's eyes widened despite her attempt to appear unfazed. She studied alone. She always did. From time to time she joined other people from her House to write essays, but that was it. Most Gryffindors could hardly be bothered with research in the library for the sake of research. And while she had a few acquaintances in Ravenclaw, she found their constant dedication to study... dull. They followed the curriculum almost obsessively, and while that allowed them a leg up in class, it hardly made sense in Minerva's eyes. They were going to learn the curriculum from a professor, why spend your free time on something that you'll get to learn anyway eventually?

And now that she was a fourth-year, her role as the best chaser on the Gryffindor team undisputed, her place at the top of her year unquestioned, only *now* she met people to share her passion for research with?

AN

About the MC:

There is only so much original shit I can pull off when there isn't a mad fucker roaming the School. So most of the conflict going on at this level will be about... ugh, I can't believe this, 'feelings'.

No matter how determined you are, after a life spent as a muggle you'll get swindled by magic too, so no, Hagrid hasn't figured out a plan to kill Tom yet. But Voldy is just 13 years old here, what could go wrong by waiting a while still?

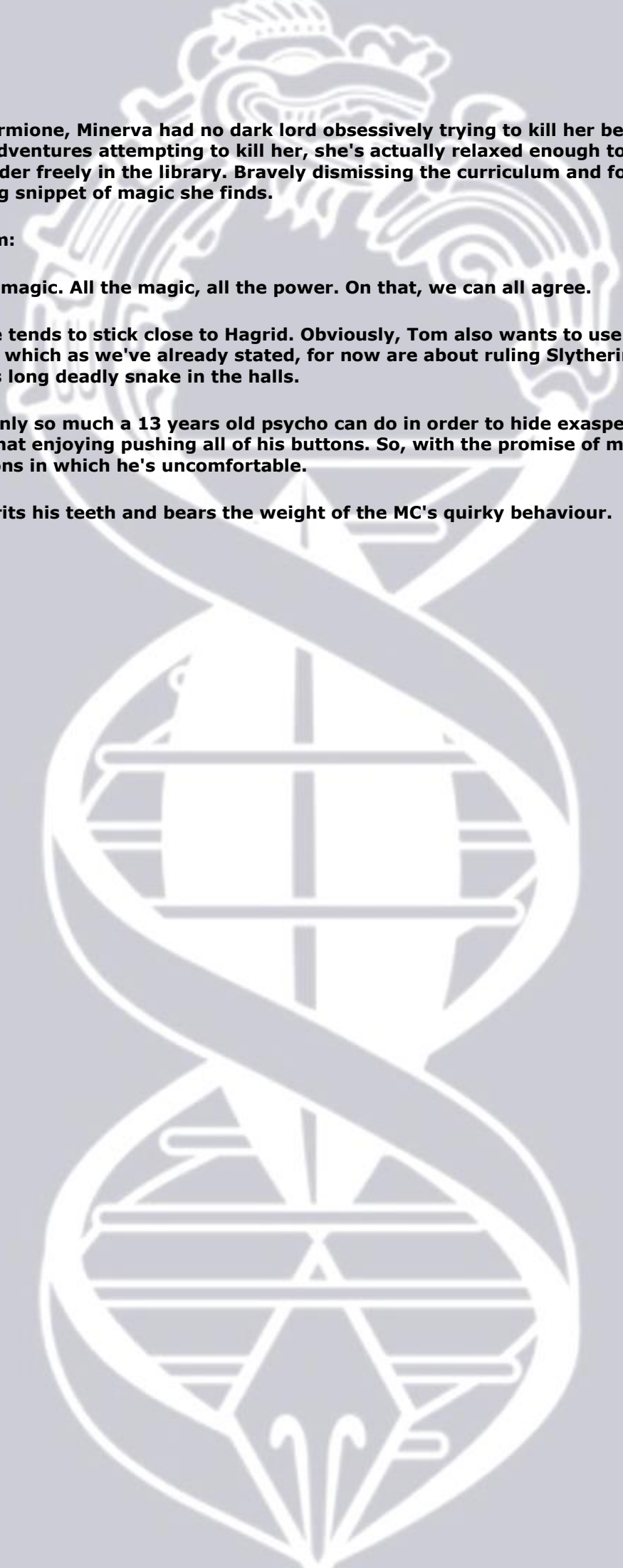
It's hard to properly convey how the MC actually feels: he's happy for this chance at a life of magic, but he knows that he basically killed the real Hagrid. For all intents and purposes, Hagrid's dad has lost a son, and being somewhat 'looney' (that's the only reason I can find for someone to have sex with a giant), he has not noticed in their month of convivence.

In his shoes, you'd be more than willing to simply distance yourself from a family member that you don't know as such. But that doesn't mean that you don't feel bad for such a family member.

Anyway: first concrete objective= finding the diadem.

About McGonagall:

From canon, it is said that she was a hat-stall, like Hermione, the hat was torn between Gryffindor and Ravenclaw.



Unlike Hermione, Minerva had no dark lord obsessively trying to kill her best friend. And without adventures attempting to kill her, she's actually relaxed enough to let her brilliant mind wander freely in the library. Bravely dismissing the curriculum and following whatever interesting snippet of magic she finds.

About Tom:

He wants magic. All the magic, all the power. On that, we can all agree.

So yes, he tends to stick close to Hagrid. Obviously, Tom also wants to use Hagrid for his own purposes, which as we've already stated, for now are about ruling Slytherin, not unleashing a 30 meters long deadly snake in the halls.

There is only so much a 13 years old psycho can do in order to hide exasperation, and our MC is somewhat enjoying pushing all of his buttons. So, with the promise of magic, he forces Tom in situations in which he's uncomfortable.

So Tom grits his teeth and bears the weight of the MC's quirky behaviour.

BASE

In the middle of the night, I awoke with a tortured groan that perfectly managed to encapsulate the sheer agony that my sleep cycle currently represented.

In the dark of my room, with my eyes still closed and encrusted with sleep, my hand fumbled on my nightstand until I found a vial that I had previously prepared, and before I could snuggle once more into the heavy, warm blankets, I uncorked it and downed its contents.

Just as the last drop was gulped down, a crisp coolness seemed to surge through my body, and I felt as if I had just splashed my face with fresh spring water, and my body shivered with unexpressed energy.

Potions are awesome. I smiled to myself as I tossed the covers away from myself and stood, grimacing for an instant as my bare feet landed on the chilly stone of the floor. My fingers found then my wand, and I expertly cast a 'lumos'.

The white light washed coldly and unfeeling over my room, shining upon the few adjustments I had made since my second week into the castle. The small desk had been transfigured into a tall bookshelf, where all of my books rested quietly, while the small chair I had once eyed mistrustfully was now a comfy armchair large enough to host me.

My eyes trailed longingly over the stacks of parchment that awaited me, but I forced myself to perform as many stretches as I could, for my body as well as for my fingers, which I feared would eventually lose mobility because of my half-giant nature. Sure, eventually I could probably purchase a series of tools in silver, which was an inert material as far as it concerned potions, but the idea of spending an inordinate amount of time dealing with clamps and whatnot to perform what any normal-sized wizard was capable of sat ill with me.

While I moved in the coldness of my room, I started to shift my stretches into what little I remembered of yoga positions, occasionally tilting my frame in order to not fall. While my body heated up because of the effort required by my movements, and a light sheen of sweat manifested upon my skin, I let my plans and thoughts about this life of mine fade away, slowly but surely quieting my nervousness about pretending friendship with Tom Riddle, allowing my guilt regarding the relationship between Hagrid and his father to be smothered by the moment, and for a while, I thought about nothing.

Once I had completed my routine, I took a quick shower, trying to cling to that particular feeling of thoughtlessness that marked my first steps on the road of the Mind Arts. While the exact mechanics of magic were simply not explained in the books I had read in my previous life, almost everything I remembered about the world was on par with my metaknowledge, so I had decided that until I managed to figure out how to trick Slughorn into teaching me Occlumency without him peering into my head, I would try to 'empty my mind', as Snape would one day tell to Harry Potter.

How to raid the Restricted Section? I asked myself as I walked quietly in the empty halls of Hogwarts. *Secrets of the Darkest Arts* and *Magic Most Evile* were going to disappear from the shelves as soon as I could manage it. I didn't know if Tom had already spotted the tomes, to be truthful, I didn't know if he had already gotten started on his quest for immortality, but if I could avoid that particular clusterfuck by doing something as minor as removing two books, well, how could I ignore such opportunity?

Entering that particular area of the Library was easy enough: besides Slughorn general giddiness at seeing me proposing outrageous stuff like preparing a Polijuce Potion that would turn someone into an animal, which I used as an excuse to research the Animagus transformation, using such a topic to bring into the fold Minerva McGonagall and a reluctantly engaged Tom Riddle, the problem wasn't reading the material in the Restricted Section, the problem was outright removing it from the school.

Hiding a book was stupidly easy: transfigure a hidden compartment into the shelves and dropping there the offending tome.

Finding such an offending tome was complex. Because while navigating the ordinary shelves was somewhat possible after a bit of practice, the Restricted Section was a clusterfuck of epic proportions, organization-wise. While the shelves closest to the divide between the two areas of the Library contained

the least dangerous topics, such as *The Shape Within* or *Moste Potente Potions*, the successive shelves followed their own order. Some books were alphabetically ordered by their author, some *didn't have* an author, and were thusly dumped in blocks with topics of the same genre, but keeping them in order was an impossible task, especially given the fact that they *moved*.

Turns out that there were reasons why some books were chained to the shelves, who knew?

So, while I had a solution of sorts in order to prevent Tom from learning about Horcruxes, I still had no idea about how to find them.

I returned from my shower with a determined glint in my eyes, and after dressing myself in the pale light of my 'lumos', I walked immediately towards the candle on which I had been practicing for the past weeks. I lit the wick simply by tapping it with the tip of my wand, before levitating the candle in front of me as I walked into the desert Common Room.

I seated into an armchair in front of a fireplace where only the embers survived, and I twisted my wrist, having the candle follow my movement and drop molten wax on the stone floor. Once I created a large enough smidge, I lowered the lit candle, leaving it upright in front of the dying embers of the fireplace.

"What is fire?" I asked myself, letting my eyes focus on the wavering flame. In Charms, fire was a cornerstone of sorts, it represented a change in its most primal state, it was instinctive to rely on the symbology of fire in order to perform a charm. Languages came in symbols after all. And to talk with magic, ergo to do magic, meant being able to grasp at the same time the final result one wanted, the intent at the start of the spell, and a symbol that managed to act as a bridge between the two.

It is Change given form. Power at its most primal. I tilted my head as I stared into the small flame of the candle, my mind focusing on my memories of stars and nuclear explosions that I had witnessed in movies. *But that isn't quite it.* I frowned as my memories of Fawkes from the Harry Potter books surged forth in my mind. *Destruction and rebirth?*

"Incendio works well enough I guess." I muttered as my perspective of Fire slowly *shifted* until I could see into the small candle's flame both the shining sun, the reassuring lit hearth, and the wavering licks of flame that attempted to chase away the dark.

Symbols had no meanings on their own, what did a dragon understand of symbols? Nothing. The dragon understood the rage and the erasing of the opponent that threatened its territory. What did phoenixes understand of fire? They died in it and were born from it, but there was no symbol to act as a buffer between the creature and the magic, for they didn't need it.

Wizardkind needed symbols in order to apply any kind of controlled magic to the world around them, be they spoke, gestured, or simply thought. But it was the caster that gave meaning to the symbol, and the understanding of the meaning that gave power to the spell.

So, while I easily used the symbolism of fire in order to cast charms, in particular, the aspect of fire that stood for change, what symbol was I going to use for fire itself? Fire was easy, if vast, to understand. And any scientific notion that I had about it wasn't going to help, I was lucky enough that I could take as face value that magic and physics were simply separated.

An exothermic chemical reaction? Useless labels when it came to magic. Fire was Hunger, and Light, and Warmth, and Scorching Heat, and Complete Change, it was Energy, and Killer, and Life-Giver. Fire was a multitude of things, each with its meaning, each worthy of its own symbol.

Without a word, I lifted my wand, keeping the symbolism clear in my head, the multitude of meanings that I could grasp present in my mind as a lit flame themselves, each turning into another and yet staying the same, for Fire was Fire, no matter if it was scorching Sun or warm Hearth, and I pointed the length of holly towards the candle that had by then burned half of its length.

With a ripple through the air, the flame on the wick spread like a folding fan, a curtain fluttering outwards on invisible wisps of air, until the quiet cover of flames landed over the embers of the fireplace, and there they remained.

Where before there was a lit candle in front of an almost empty fireplace, now the candle was no longer lit, and the dying embers and warm ashes were akin to a stretch of lush greenery, where each blade of grass was a single, gently waving flame.

Then I blinked, and the *shift* in perspective that had allowed me to grasp the concept of Fire left me while the world righted itself once more, and everything looked ordinary, except for the small carpet of flames that remained in the fireplace, giving off more warmth than they should have been able to.

What the fuck did I just do? I remained seated for a while, trying to grasp again the sense of detached understanding I had previously achieved, only to fall short of it when I heard shuffling and quiet noises from the doors that led to the dormitories.

When I tilted my eyes towards one of the clocks resting against the walls, I simply rose from my seat. Breakfast would start soon, and curfew consigned students to their common rooms only until 7 a.m., I had just the time for a jump in the Library before stuffing my gob with the divine food provided by house-elves.

Maybe I'll nap before the start of lessons. I thought as I lumbered out of the Common Room, feeling tiredness that weighted heavily over my eyelids.

"What are two Slytherin Wizards and one Gryffindor witch doing in the middle of the night in deserted corridor?" I asked barely restraining a guffawing laugh.

"I hope you have an answer, because you're the one that dragged us in this foolishness." Riddle snarked from behind me as we completed another floor of stairs and reached the fourth floor.

"Yeah, I do, but I wanted to remark how this situation looks like the beginning of a raunchy joke."

"Must you be so uncouth?"

"Why are we doing this at night again?" Minerva's voice cut my laughter before I could properly reply to Tom Riddle's quiet distaste for anything related to 'socializing'.

"Because secrets don't belong to the day, and symbols are important in magic?" I tossed out in the air my random-ass answer, knowingly teasing my two companions.

"That's not what Professor Farsee meant."

"If you say so, Riddle. Yet, you couldn't resist and now you're here." I shrugged uncaringly as we kept walking.

"Must you be so aggravating Hagrid?"

"Why yes! Yes, I must!"

"Can we get on with this blatant and unnecessary violation of the rules?" the Gryffindor witch snapped at us, her wand held loftily in front of her in order to shine light in the dark hallways of the school.

"Oh, Minerva, don't deny that your Gryffindor self is enjoying this!"

"And why do you call each other with your surnames but I'm called by my first name?"

"That would be because you're a beautiful witch with a beautiful name." I quipped, before turning towards my fellow Slytherin, "See that Riddle? That's how you woo a witch."

"How dare you?" the spluttering reaction of Minerva almost covered the huff of irritation from Riddle, who spoke: "I don't need to woo anyone, thank you."

"Take it easy Minerva, we may be walking in the dark, but I can feel the heat of your blushing from here. And Riddle, you really should get yourself a date. Why, take Minerva here for example..." I quickened my steps once I found that we were nearing my objective.

"We're not having this conversation." Minerva's stinging hex rippled ineffectively over my left shoulder, stealing a smile out of me.

"I quite agree."

"If I wasn't here to amuse myself both of you would probably spend all your time studying on your own."

"That has never been a problem." the pursed lips of Minerva found confirmation of her opinion in Riddle's words.

"Magic isn't meant to be this stale thing we're being spoonfed during the lessons. Magic is mysterious, it should be practiced accordingly, and rightfully so."

"This is not one of your insane potions for which you go gallivanting for ingredients... Now that I think about it, how did you two know where Gryffindor's Common Room was?" the Gryffindor witch asked.

"That's surprisingly easy, think about the most hideous hiding entrance in one of the most 'over the top' areas of the castle..."

"The Fat Lady is a..."

Minerva started to defend the portrait that hid her Common Room only for me to interrupt her: *Snoore*
"Let's focus on magic now, aye?"

"Are you sure you aren't doing this simply because you can't fly a broom to save your life?" Riddle's voice tried ineffectively to tease me enough to reveal the real purpose of our nightly excursion, receiving only a sly glance for his effort.

"It's not that I can't fly a broom, it's that I'm too heavy for it." I ignored the teasing, "I could string a couple of brooms together in order to keep me afloat, but I'd much prefer to find my own solution to flight."

"Broom-less flight?" Minerva seemed to look at me like I was mad: "I sometimes forget that you're a Slytherin."

"And what do you think I am when you forget the Green and Silver on my tie?"

"A madman."

"Fair enough." I laughed while Riddle thinly smiled, showing to the world his amusement in a proper and dignified manner.

"Will you tell us why you dragged us out in the night?" Tom finally asked, "I'd say we've been far more than simply accomodating. The promise of not regretting this will carry you only so far."

"I agree."

At the words of Minerva, I sighed in defeat: "I wanted this to be a surprise of sorts, but Riddle hates riddles, and you're as curious as a cat, aren't you Minerva?"

We turned left into yet another deserted hallway and I came to a stop. On my left, the wall of the long corridor sported a wide succession of leaded windows that pointed south-west, showing us the moon as

she began her descent towards the horizon. The sight the windows allowed us included a large stretch of the Hogwarts grounds, with the Forbidden Forest north-side and one stretch of the Black Lake just beyond a small hill where I supposed one day would host a certain Whomping Willow.

Suddenly I stopped, and opened the tall double doors on my right, revealing a quite large room that rested under an inch of dust: "I want us to raise walls on the opposite sides of this corridor, and turn this whole thing in a private Common Room of sorts."

The room that I showed them was half as large as the Great Hall, and I had discovered it by chance a couple of months prior, hiding behind a tapestry that Pix the Poltergeist, of all people, had once hung in front of the doors, eventually forgetting completely about it.

"That's why you've been levitating those boulders from the Black Lake?" Tom pointed at the tall pile of stones that I had taken from the depths of the Lake during the Winter Hols.

At the end of November, I had declined the option of returning home for the Winter Break, unwilling to expose myself to weeks with Hagrid's father, and so, while everybody but the muggle-borns had returned home, I was left sharing Slythering with only Tom Riddle, and the rest of the school with the only people, aside from the staff, aware that there was a war going on in the wider world. I had obviously exploited the situation as much as I could.

"Why would you want to do this?" Minerva's tired sigh clued me in to the fact that she didn't see the appeal of having such a private space where she could do what the hell she wanted, only having to keep track of me and Tom.

"First: to see if we could. Second: because in this way we don't have to wrap up our project anytime we leave the Library. Third: you'd have a space where you can become an Animagus before your O.W.L.s, so you can dazzle the world being the youngest witch to ever achieve the transformation." *Because this will make it easy for me to coast on your brilliance, leaving your notes available to me once you leave Hogwarts.* I smiled smartly at the two talented mages that eyed me shrewdly.

"And because this way you can observe us modify the hall and apply those changes to your own room." Riddle insightfully pointed out, making me scratch the back of my head bashfully.

"Your own room?" Minerva distractedly inquired, her mind likely still focused on the possibility of becoming an Animagus at 15 years of age. *If Pettigrew managed it, there is little doubt that she can too. And in the meantime I'll learn human transfiguration ahead of the program.*

"Yeah, you gryffs may be okay with sleeping in the same dormitory, but Slytherin encourages everyone to make up their own sleeping arrangements, from the first to the seventh year." I snorted dismissively. *If I had to share a room with eleven years old children I would have murdered them and pinned it on Riddle.* Then I blinked as the thought crossed my mind. *That was actually a good plan.*

"So your plan was to levitate and transfigure the boulders in order to wall off the two extremities of the corridor?" Riddle brought us back on track, his eyes gleaming greedily at the idea of building his own private room in Hogwarts.

"I've prepared a potion..."

"Obviously." quipped Minerva con a sigh, earning herself a glare from me.

"Don't diss potions, they can do everything a wizard does with a wand, only without being taxing in the slightest." I reprimanded the witch that sniffed disdainfully, "You don't really need to transfigure the rocks, only stack them together after spreading a few drops of this beauty between one and another."

As I spoke, I fished out a rucksack filled with vials, revealing them to my two companions.

"Such a muggle method." Riddle's voice expressed disinterest, but his eyes studied curiously the dull green glow that escaped the potion that I was showing them.

"I don't recall saying that I would be on board with this foolishness." Minerva tilted her head upwards slightly, attempting to stare us down, reprimanding us with a glare that resulted quite ineffective, since she was barely 1,60 meters tall, reaching just beneath my shoulder.

"You would have already gone away if you didn't want to be here. You simply want us to accept your objection so that the fault will be ours if we're discovered." Riddle spoke softly while his eyes tried to pry the secrets from my potions, "Venomous Tentacula?" he inquired, tilting his head towards me.

"Just a little, then some Devil's Snare." I explained, easily recalling the story behind the potion I had brewed to act as lime to string together the boulders: "Vines to bind, you see, and these rocks were deep down in the lake, where light doesn't reach, they'll remember the quiet, the cold, and the dark."

"It will make the walls highly capable of holding wards." my fellow Slytherin idly commented, his fingers twitching as if he was barely restraining himself from getting to work.

"What about the doors?" Minerva inquired, finally dropping her reluctant act.

I simply pointed at the two largest boulders I had found, each measuring roughly around 4x3x2 meters³: "If we place them at the center of the wall, then you can transfigure a door on the surface, and a lock of some sort... But that's more something that you need to work out with Riddle."

"Why me?" the Heir of Slytherin arched an eyebrow, knowingly setting himself up to be recognized as the best with wards.

"Because of reasons that everybody already knows, Tom." Minerva rolled her eyes, "It seems to me that Rubeus is going to do very little to help."

"Hey, I did the grunt work and the planning." I protested whipping out my wand in order to cast a Lumos that shone forcefully in the room, revealing a cluster of furnishings that I had lifted from the Room of Requirement on every weekend that Riddle spent in Hogsmeade, "And I've set up a bathroom in the next room of the corridor. Bath, toilets, showers, even a sauna... I'm planning to add a colorful leaded window, but I haven't had the time to learn how to make one."

"Why do you know how to set up a toilet?" Riddle blurted out in surprise, eyeing me like I had two heads.

So that when I go gallivanting around the world I don't have to shit in bushes. "Because I was curious about how plumbing and magic interacted." *And a bathroom in which I'm sure a basilisk cannot pop out from a toilet sounded like a good idea.*

"It's more likely that you've picked the wrong book from the Library, but didn't want to look like a fool by not using it." Minerva outright laughed at me, but her expression was actually interested now. *I guess the idea of a personal bath is enough to completely sway her.*

"It's nothing glamorous for now, the bath takes 6 hours in order to be filled with water, and I still have to enchant the taps, I'll probably prepare a coating in order to keep the tiles bright, or I'll outright plan out a mosaic with some runes on it." I shook my hands in the direction of my companions.

"How do we avoid being spotted by the prefects or the professors?" Riddle, apparently sold on my plan of stealing for ourselves this unused section of the castle, started to tilt one vial of my potion this and that way, studying how the light of our Lumos seemed to disappear into it.

"Luckily, tonight is Slughorn's turn..."

"Professor Slughorn." Minerva interrupted me, making me frown.

"Sluggy." I stated firmly, just to tweak her nose, "Tonight is Sluggy's turn to be the professor walking around, and the prefects' rounds have washed over this area just after curfew."

"Tomorrow is a Saturday, people will sleep in, nobody will notice if we're not around." Riddle nodded thoughtfully, "We should set up the walls and the notice-me-not before morning, then we can build upon them..."

"No blood." I wiggled my index at him, "Once we're gone from Hogwarts, it would be great if this room could pass to the next brightest wizard or witch in the castle."

"And our heirs." he countered.

"If our 'heirs' are not capable of distinguishing themselves magically, then they don't deserve whatever we manage to leave behind." Minerva returned from her inspection of the closest stack of boulders, "And I feel that I need to point out that your ambition is going out of control. You're not the Founders."

"Only because we haven't founded anything yet." Riddle's charming smile was infectious, and for a second, I imagined how I would go about founding my own school.

Something like a university for magic? No, a whole village in which only the brightest are admitted? I banished the thought from my mind before it could spiral out of control: "Let's start small, shall we? Namely, with the walls."

AN

I don't really know how to fill the years at Hogwarts. I don't want to write down lesson upon lesson. I don't want to be repetitive showing different potions, and I don't want Hagrid to become the next Merlin less than one year into his schooling, so there is a lot of skipping between a relevant interaction and another.

Since I'm not using the 'magical core' route for this fic, I felt that it didn't make sense to have transfigurations fade on their own. Still, as I've hinted in the third chapter, there must be a difference between a real parrot and a transfigured one, otherwise, people would actually simply eat what they conjure or transfigure.

Multiplying food is okay, making it out of nowhere isn't.

So, I'm bringing forth the implications of the first lesson with Dumbledore: Transfiguration only changes the Shape. And all things transfigured are 'lesser' than their equivalent (otherwise people would transfigure gold and fuck the goblins, don't get me started on the fictions in which 'for some magical reason' (= read author's convenience) some shit *can't happen*).

Even so, talking to you about how Hagrid set up a toilet using magic seems kind of boring. Really, there are pipes in the castle, how difficult can it be to use magic to add to them? I preferred showing off a part of the magic of understanding-symbolism with the MC playing with fire, I found it more meaningful.

As for Tom's canon timeline:

he first starts with the Chamber debacle in 1942-43, then in the first summer in which he's 17, he sets out and uses his uncle to murder his muggle family, obtaining the ring, and Dumbledore obliquely indicates that Tom uses significant murders for his horcruxes, so it's reasonable enough that cutting off his familial ties results in him turning the Resurrection Stone into a Horcrux.

After he graduates I think he immediately tries to get a job as DADA professor, but by then Dumbles is already headmaster, and uses the excuse of Tom's youth to discard him. After that, he works for Borgin, while eventually traveling to Albania for Ravenclaw's diadem, and before going off to fuck up with rituals, he obtains Hufflepuff's Cup and Slytherin's Locket.

He disappears for a number of years before making his return to drop the diadem at Hogwarts, still trying for the DADA's role while cursing the position, effectively crippling Britain's next generation. As for the exact years... well, I'll write them down as we go, but his war canonically starts after 1965 and before 1975. It also depends on what you mean with 'beginning of the war', if you talk ideology, well, Grindelwald recruited massively in the muggle-born population, since they're the ones that literally couldn't live loftily as purebloods, and neither could they be productive elements of muggle society. That exacerbated, even more, the purist movement that Riddle started riding in his later years at Hogwarts.

I'm thinking that Riddle started to subvert Slytherin in his fourth-fifth year, in particular using the Hogsmeade weekends to 'talk idly about the current events' (which is Grindelwald's war), and he keeps his contacts with his future minions while he does what he wants to do with magic, until he's ready to take over.

By then he was already relatively insane because being unable to use the purebloods that follow you in order to grab the whole Ministry means only that you're impatient, or that you pushed too hard on the pissing on 'inferior beings' while you drum up support (understandable, as our favourite psycho doesn't see anything bad in burning the world to the ground if he can rule the ashes).

The next chapter will be in the summer, with Hagrid starting to 'stretch his legs', as it were.

Thoughts, Opinions? I'm trying to focus a lot on the interactions here, trying to not make Minerva or Tom a 2-D cardboard character. Did I manage it?

Summer's Prelude

Minerva had declined to face the return trip in my carriage, preferring to spend time with her Housemates, while Tom had decided to attend to some Slytherin power-play that I didn't care about with his fellow third years, leaving me pretty much on my own. Not that I cared. Not at all.

Fucking hell this train ride is boring. I thought bitterly as I lowered one of the books that I had unrepentantly nicked from the Library. My large hands caressed the cover of the *Standard Books of Spells, grade 1*, that I had replaced the original tome's cover with. *Diffindo, Reparo, Engorgio and Reducio*. I sang to myself, recalling the sequence of events that allowed me to steal this particular kind of knowledge.

The Scottish Highlands flashed outside the window, letting inside of the compartment large swathes of summer sunlight, which never failed to bring me a smile, since it reminded me of the several brews that I had managed to turn some form of light into. That, along with the creation of the Rùnda, our secret room, had largely been the reason why I hadn't simply blasted my way through the curriculum of the first five years of all of my subjects.

That, and Tom and Minerva's company. I reluctantly admitted to myself. While my initial purpose had been riding the talent of the Gryffindor witch and the Slytherin wizard, I had to admit that having someone that faced magic with the same ingenuity (if only occasionally), and the same spark of genius (more often than not). Sure as hell the end-of-year exams hadn't been what pushed me to study. No, while obtaining among the highest marks of my years in DADA and Astronomy, while outright humiliating my 'peers' in Potions, Charms, Transfiguration, and Herbology, had been somewhat entertaining, I learned a wide array of stuff mostly because of my shared projects with Tom and Minerva.

In the end, to my insistence and delight, Minerva, Tom, and I agreed to call the corridor we coopted from the school 'Rùnda', which was Irish for 'Secret'. The corridor on the fourth floor had disappeared overnight, and if a couple of tapestries were hung where some air-head remembered a passage, nobody mentioned it. After all, it was known that Hogwarts could be quirky: moving stairs, secret passages, unused classrooms popping around as if to look for a purpose...

The whole length of the corridor had on one side an impressive sequence of leaded glass panels that I had not yet the time to enchant, and on the other side two doors. One led to the bathroom, that I may or may not have gone overboard with. Surely it was just as good as the Prefects' bath, for instead of a bathtub I had placed a veritable pool that mimicked a beach.

There was no sand, but the floor was tilted in a way that allowed the user to simply walk inside of the pool, which reached five meters of depth after 20 or so meters spent moving in the same direction. Minerva ended up helping with the mosaic on the floor, which depicted an ever-changing swirl of colors with its highly reflective tiles, over which I had painted a light coating of 'Bright-Ice'. Which I had obtained through a potion experiment geared towards capturing the reflection of the sun over the crest of the Black Lake's small waves.

Said coating was the magical equivalent of a hydro-repellent substance and it kept the water constantly moving. To be truthful, its specific workings were not what I had been aiming for, and so the whys were still to be understood. The coating's main effect, however, besides circulating the cleaning potions that I had added to the water, was that the surface of the small pool was constantly covered by small waves.

Instead of taps to choose the temperature of the water, I had crafted a 5x5 square meters large shower nozzle, which recreated a raining effect that could go from light to tempest-like. The toilets themselves had been easy enough to build, even if I had to raise a small wall between the 'pool-area' and the 'shitting-zone', which included silencing charms and ever-fresh-air enchantments placed over the stalls, the latter of which had been provided by a disdainful Tom Riddle.

Sinks were placed against the wall right under the mirror that stretched all the way from the entrance to the opposite wall, and I had gone all out with adding sets of my potions that, while still untested on normal human skin, should act as soap.

The walls were still bare, and mildly depressing with their stone-grey presence, but any further pimping-up of the room wasn't going to be carried out by me. There was only so much interest that building a bathroom could hold for me. I'd keep tweaking it during my years at Hogwarts, because I never knew when a spark of inspiration could hit me, but that was for the future.

Instead, behind a 4 meters tall oaken double doors, which were eventually going to be engraved from top to bottom, there was the actual reason behind Minerva's, Tom's, and my slaving away at impossible hours of both the day and night for the entire length of the second two trimesters spent at the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.

The room was rather large, with a ceiling that stood comfortably at five meters of height, but that I had no doubt would one day be pushed further up in order to accommodate some sort of library. For now, enchanted windows, courtesy of Tom, had been placed flat against the ceiling, let the natural daylight climb in, even if the sight of a meadow that stretched towards the Forbidden Forest perpendicularly to our roof was quite jarring.

Three separate desks had been temporarily placed in the center of the room. Mine, which was quite large to accommodate for my size, faced towards the doors, while the other two, which were slowly being subtly transfigured and enchanted to better suit the tastes of their owners, were facing each other and were placed sideways between my position and the entrance to the room.

Directly from the stone walls had been transfigured stone shelves, to host both books and notes. Tom, Minerva, and I agreed that each of us deserved his own smaller bookshelf, where we could place those tomes we were using for this or that project. Once those tomes had exhausted their usefulness, they would be returned to the main bookshelf with an added copy of our notes (if we felt like adding those).

On my insistence, and mostly because I was somewhat eager to have my brews tested, I added a selection of potions dedicated to personal entertainment. Sure I should have done some testing before placing them down, but while I was one of his favorites, I still wasn't a 'pupil' of old Sluggy, and so I was reticent about showing the true extent of my understanding of his subject, nevermind my original brews.

It was hard to not recognize that Minerva and Tom were the only kinds of friends that I was going to be able to make in Hogwarts. The first because of her brilliance, which counterbalanced her unavoidable 'being a teen in the forties'-related issues, the seconds... because even if you consciously knew that a dragon was dangerous and had the potential to kill you, there was no denying that it was fucking cool being chums with one.

I felt a soft smile turn my lips upwards, and I shook my head as I silently reprimanded me. *What if...*

What if I don't kill Tom. The option was obvious, thinking myself important and capable enough in order to keep Tom from going on a Power-Hungry rampage was surely flattering. But if I failed I would end up telling myself 'I told you so' in an extremely condescending tone.

While Tom's talent in all things magic-related was awe-inspiring, especially considering that he was actually 13 years old and had no idea whatsoever about the kind of examples of the magic that I had rolling in my head, he was extremely good at manipulating people. Well, extremely good at playing Slytherin's tendency of pretending to be some sort of political training arena for the scions of the Pureblood traditionalists.

While I considered those thoughts, my hand slipped again over one of the several books that I had blatantly stolen from the Restricted Section of the Library, lifting the bright blue, mismatched hardcover in order to stare at the title.

Magic Most Evile. I whispered in my own mind, slowly but surely forcing myself to the page I had reached before my brief bout of introspection.

If Tom doesn't stumble on these texts, maybe he won't go mad. I tried to be an optimist. *Maybe I'll actually be interesting enough to push him without having him turn to word domination.*

It was a heady thought. For some reason, the idea of stopping Voldemort from existing gave me goosebumps much more than my half-baked idea of saving Hiroshima. *Is it because I actually know him? Because interacting with him makes him real?*

I needed to travel, I needed to see this world of mine without walls to keep me safe, without historians and interpreters to tell me in which direction the events should flow. This need was clear to my senses, if thanks to my attempts at Occlumency or only because I was simply aware of myself and my own desires I couldn't tell.

I still have time. I reassured myself. *If Tom kills people with the Basilisk, I'll know for sure if I have to kill him or not.* I finally compromised, and with Voldemort's fate pushed into the hands of my future self, I ineffectually tried to relax as my eyes roamed over Olde English words that described the best kind of sacrifice in order to power up rituals.

Finding the books had been a stroke of luck, finding them without the knowledge of Tom, with whom I often roamed the Restricted Section, thanks to Slughorn's greed, was almost a blessing. Figuring out quickly that the wards that made stealing books from the Library impossible were tied to the covers of the books and not to the pages themselves had been instead a stroke of genius.

Deciding to take all the horcrux-related tomes I could in that manner, during the course of several weeks in order to not get caught, was undoubtedly the hardest decision I had taken this far in my new life as Rubeus Hagrid. It meant directly removing a piece that was instrumental to the creation of Voldemort.

For all of my boasting, for all of my interaction with Tom and Minerva, I never actively influenced pieces of their lives with the purpose of changing History. While what I did already was most certainly enough to butterfly its way into some heavy differences, there hadn't been a clear intent to do so on my part.

Maybe it's better that neither Tom nor Minerva shared my ride home. I thought as I slowly came to terms with my decision of postponing my murder of Riddle.

With a heavy breath, I repeated the words I read in the safe confines of my head: *Life of the innocent, willingly given.*

AN

Very very brief chapter, but I needed to break this chapter in two, you'll see why as soon as I finish the next. I hope you'll not hate me, but I was planning this shit for a while.

Hello! I'm letting you know that I've set up my own site, where my fics can be downloaded in pdf (complete, not chapter by chapter), and you can support me through a donation if you have the means and the wish to do so (I'm waiting to punch through 50k words before uploading stories there, bear with it please!).

cloud9stories dot net is the name of my site, you can find the complete caption on my profile if googling it isn't enough (for whatever reason ff doesn't let me copy-past the URL here).

Thank you!

Routine

I started my second year at Hogwarts less than a week before when Slughorn approached me. It was on a Saturday, and I was still readjusting to having a regular rhythm of sorts, now that I was no longer living on my own in the results of... *better not thinking about it.*

Even if my magical escapade had yielded an objectively great result, it would be some time still before I could truly relax in the soft pillow of my hypocrisy. Pragmatically speaking, I didn't die with my first experimental ritual, which was a good point, another was the impossibly good concealing ward grown with the modified ash tree that towered in what was now *my* property. On the other hand, I had ruthlessly exploited both the naivete of a helpless, dying wizard, and engineered his death so that it would benefit me. *Sure, he was already dying, but...*

I shook my head, focusing on following my Head of House as he led me to his office.

"You did all of your summer assignments, even if for some reason you don't seem able to reach the required length in your essays..." he started reprimanding me about the quality of my homework.

I didn't bother defending myself, half-assing my written work freed me a lot of time that I could dedicate to stuff that actually managed to challenge me. I focused during classes, but that was mostly because I wanted to master each spell without the need to further practice it on my own. Again, it was only so that I could not waste time and energy that I could dedicate to my own exploring of the possibilities of the world of magic.

"My marks are good enough," I shrugged uncaringly, "and if I spent any more time on my assignments, I would never have discovered how to brew sunlight during the last year."

"Why do you think I haven't taken points or assigned detentions?" Slughorn joyfully pointed out as we turned yet another one of the endless corners that made up the bowels of the castle, "Merlin knows that as long as your grades are on this level, few professors will... how does the youth say it these days?... Oh yes, *nag your ears off.*"

The portly wizard stopped briefly to nod in self-satisfaction before looking at me from above his shoulder as we started to walk down a stretch of staircase: "It is rather obvious that you could do much more if you actually bothered to *try* with your assignments, but the faculty tends to focus on those that risk to not pass their year, so you're in the clear for now. Your practical work is top-notch, even if your approach isn't always the one we instructed you to follow."

"Sir?" I asked, not understanding why he had breached the topic only to not share his opinion about it.

"The point is, Mr. Hagrid..." he sighed, "The faculty agrees that you're talented, extremely so, and it's bad enough that you are aware of it, but consider this your warning: coasting around your magical education will serve you ill on the long term. Flaunting your disinterest for both House Points and your marks isn't going to win you many friends among the professors."

He eyed me shrewdly then: "On a personal note, and I will deny if I'm asked, I'd say that it would be a pity to see your unique approach to magic being cut down by the... curriculum-orthodoxies... that roam the castle."

"Consider me warned..."

"...but you'll keep doing as you are." Slughorn completed my sentence for me with a satisfied nod, "You're ambitious enough for ten Slytherins, keep it up, but stop flaunting it."

Finally, we reached our destination, and an imposing oaken door let us through as we approached.

The room in which he led me was suitably large, even for a Head of House' Office, meaning that it spanned easily 20 meters in one direction and another fifteen in the other, while it was graced by the natural sunlight that shone through the wall-spanning windows. Everywhere I could look spoke of a rather cushy salary: imposing armchairs, no less than three fireplaces, even what appeared to be a golden brazier of all things, fur carpets, animated tapestries, and an assortment of knick-knacks that elegantly spanned across the furniture.

"Oh, here is where I hold my... I'm sure you've heard about it, don't make that false surprise face, Mr. Hagrid, I perfected it long before you were born you know?" he smiled shrewdly as I walked behind him: "Anyway, here is where I hold my Slug-club, and I make no secret that I'd have invited you in already, sadly, the Headmaster recommended to wait for the students to be in their third years before I... ahem."

When he faux-coughed instead of quoting the likely less-than-respectable term that Dippet used to refer to his power-hungry-master-manipulator-fat-web-spinner- habits, I scoffed: "I'd imagine that waiting for the students to see Hogsmeade would give them the occasion to start seeing and thinking about the wider world..."

Slughorn seemed unusually exuberant, even for his standards, when he showed me the last project he had started on. He led me across the veritable hall that he somewhat peddled as an 'office' into a smaller room, this one was instead a potion laboratory of respectable dimensions, one with stacked ingredients on numerous shelves that stretched up to the 6 meters tall ceiling, a single slanted window, and the most curious terrarium over a mahogany desk.

It looks like he made liberal use of enlarging charms to turn the office in his Slug-club's Hall and the closet into this. I thought withholding a bout of laughter.

"It appears similar to an extremely large butterfly but with a wolf-like skull in place of an ordinary head." the portly man talked excitedly as he pointed at the terrarium in which I spied a lime-like, spiked carapace, "When it is not flying with its spiked wings, the Swooping Evil shrinks into a green spiny cocoon. It can be quite dangerous, you see, as it is an encephalophage, it feeds on people's brains, and its tough green skin has the ability to deflect at least some spells. It secretes venom that erases memories."

The terrarium itself was a rather large glass sphere, in which seemed like a wizard had captured a stretch of jungle: there, he showed me the strange critter, which was resting inside of his green, spiny cocoon. *That's a cool terrarium.*

"The same creature used in New York?" I asked, referring mentally to the events I had researched in one of my first attempts to determine whether the events of *Fantastical Beasts and Where to Find them* depicted something that actually happened.

Surprisingly, the highly insular and heavily opinionated *Daily Prophet* had mentioned the last greatest Almost-Break of the Statute of Secrecy, even if I had to look for the event in past copies. *Thank Merlin the Library keeps an archive of the Prophet's editions.*

"The very same!" Slughorn laughed delightedly, "It is a very niche piece of information, I had no idea you were so well read on the happenings on the other side of the ocean."

But my thoughts went suddenly in a very specific direction even as I answered. *Can I use it to erase Tom's memories? To give him a blank state?* "The venom was diluted through the rain and saved the Statute of Secrecy, it was the highlight of the last few years."

"It was indeed! Speaking of highlight, it is extraordinary that when its venom is diluted enough, it targets only bad memories, if it is because the creature's nature as a brain-eater makes him immediately target those memories, making some suspect that the Aztecs..."

"I'm guessing that there is now another recipe for a forgetfulness potion under your name professor?" I interrupted with an apologetic, if eager, smile. I wanted to hear something actually interesting, the possible ascendancy of the green brain-eater did not fall under that category. Besides, I preferred doing my own research about any interesting magical creature that I came across. And while I was interested somewhat in insect-like ones, it was only because of the Acromantula egg that I had resting on my desk at home that I had dedicated any time at all at Creatures as a subject.

Even if selective crossbreeding could allow me precise ingredients for my brews. I realized it far too late to ask Slughorn for a complete explanation of the magical creature.

"I see that while your brain is active and running, your tongue still gets ahead of it." Slughorn reprimanded me with a piercing look that made me do my best to look bashful: "Well, no matter, it took me a whole year to get my hands on this exemplar, it cost a pretty Galleon, let me tell you, and I spent most of my free time in the last year researching this little critter."

"Hence the improved forgetfulness potion." I guessed. *I really need a way to remain abreast of the most recent magical research that isn't Transfiguration Today.*

The exalted Potions Professor smiled and slid towards me an open book, pointing excitedly on the index, where 'Daunt-Dimming Draught' was listed as a creation of one Horace Slughorn.

Fascinated by such a mild application of magic, which I guessed required precision in the dosage of each component that was going to be mind-blowing, I quickly turned to the page that listed the recently invented potion.

"Very delicate." I immediately commented as I skimmed the recipe. *Two month-long process, necessity to simmer under the moon, usage of a crystal lens to enhance the light of Polar Star, which I'm guessing is used as a guiding tool for the potion... Fucking hell, this bastard applied my method to brew sunlight to the stars! I now know why he was telling me to keep doing whatever I wanted.*

"It's revolutionary." I smiled thinly at the professor, and maybe for the first time, I was reminded that there was some worth to Slughorn's name. Potions were extremely complex things, an underpowered potion wasn't a Polijuice that transformed only your hair, it was a poisonous attempt at your life. And not quite for the first time, I reminded myself that he was a fat-bastard of an opportunist.

Returning to the Daunt-Dimming Brew, as Slughorn had explained in my very first lesson, a potion was a *story*. A broken story wasn't a potion, was a mess, and considered that potions were mostly brewed in order to be drunk, the consequences were quite dire. Obtaining a potion capable of targeting a very specific thing was a thing, Fred and George had managed that much with their sweets to cause and stop nosebleeds, Skelegro had an exact target.

The Daunt-Dimming Draught was a potion that not only targeted bad memories, but that simply scrubbed them a little, removing the edge of traumatic experiences. It was something that would not remove memories, for that sort of thing there were several options, no, this was... truly extraordinary. And I licked my lips wondering what effects it would have on me.

...bloodied coughs that echoed wetly within the circle of stones...

"There are less than ten people in this castle capable of recognizing the complexity of the effects of this potion, Mr. Hagrid, six of those are members of the staff, and I assure you, no 12 years old student has any business in understanding something of this magnitude." Slughorn's smile was outright predatory, "So I'll spare us the effort of pretending that you didn't notice my use of your solution to concentrate the properties of sunlight in this potion."

The Daunt-Dimming Draught would make my memories of the summer feel... in black and white, for lack of a better comparison.

...roots piercing the skin, eyes shattering like glass...

I shrugged, not seeing Slughorn's point while I tried to focus. Yeah, he was somewhat a cunt because he blatantly made use of something that should have been my intellectual property, but that would teach me why wizards were so damn secretive: "You turned my detentions into lessons, professor, I guess that the least I could do was sharing my reasoning."

"Quite." the Slytherin in front of me replied, "Nevertheless, Saint Mungo ordered a rather large amount of this particular brew, and I was wondering if you'd be interested in joining the other student that will be giving me a hand. It would be an invaluable learning opportunity."

So you get to sell shit brewed by me and another poor sod, while I have to bite my tongue and say thank you? Fuck you. "I'm honored professor, but I'd rather experiment on my own..."

I'd appreciate a dose of this Draught. I forced down the shiver that the horrific death of my 'father' brought me.

"The ingredients for this particular brew are quite rare, I'm afraid that purchasing them is quite beyond your means." the professor replied, letting the 'I'll catch you if you try to steal them' unsaid, "But I understand that you wouldn't do *nothing* for *nothing*. So if you're curious about a particular potion, I guess that I could spend the time your work would free for me to instruct you."

"That's... surprisingly fair of you professor." I blinked in surprise.

"Mr. Hagrid, we both know that you'll likely grow to be an exceptional potion Master, why wouldn't I nurture that talent now that nobody else would give you the time of the day?" Slughorn didn't even pretend to not have secondary objectives while helping me, he declared outright that he was lending me a hand in order to be kept on my 'good books' if I ever became a big voice in the larger world of potion-making. *Or in the world at large.* I corrected my previous statement.

I had accepted at the moment he had made the offer, but that didn't mean that I couldn't take a moment to balk at the sheer balls that Slughorn had to have in order to say such a proposition out loud: "Felix Felicis." I simply replied, remembering my frustrations in being unable to find the relative recipe during my first year at Hogwarts.

"Oho!" Slughorn laughed openly: "Nobody could ever doubt that you're a Slytherin! The old Felix, extremely difficult to brew, outright disastrous with the slightest error. But a deal is a deal, if you manage to make your colleague agree with this choice, then we'll brew a batch together."

Oh, right, another student. I sighed, preparing myself to having to deal with yet another no-name with a mental maturity that, to be fair, was on par with his or her age: "Who is this other student?"

"One Tom Riddle, an older Slytherin."

In hindsight, I don't know why I'm surprised.

A few days later, I was sitting in a comfortable armchair next to a fireplace in the secret room that Minerva, Tom, and I spent so much of our free time on during the previous year. It was still somewhat bland, but personality would come with use. Personally, I was eager to see what was going to happen.

Riddle was tapping his wand distractedly over an area of the wall while Minerva was dutifully stacking a large number of notes while sitting at her desk. *I know that the idea was to have a private study room, but this silence is murdering me.*

Riddle had quite readily accepted my choice of brewing Felix Felicis under the guide of Slughorn, and so we were spending much of our free time working together as we assisted our head of house in brewing the potion he invented with the aid of my discoveries. But as a consequence of our prolonged closeness, we were both a bit less tolerating of the other. Personally, I was starting to get twitchy after a few minutes spent near him when I didn't strictly need to.

"How do you enchant musical instruments to play?" I asked distractedly as I finally gave in to my impulses and selected one of the potions I had brewed for recreational purposes. *Getting tipsy will make this more bearable. Fucking hell, it's 1941, acceptable music isn't around yet.*

While I tried to console myself with the idea that there was a rather large number of live concerts in my future, Minerva took pity on me and deigned herself to answer: "With your wand?" *Oh fantastic: sarcasm.*

"So runes have nothing to do with wards?" I watched carefully as Tom waved his yew wand over the bare rock: he was attempting to figure out how to build a secret entrance that wouldn't require us to travel each time to the 4th floor, but it was a work in progress. Hogwarts was quirky, but didn't allow just anyone to rearrange it: we had pushed it by walling off an entire corridor, and my working theory was that we needed the Rùnda to become a bit more set in its ways before we could consider it an entity like the Common Rooms. *I only hope it doesn't require 1000 years.*

"Were you sleeping while I placed the notice-me-not on the Rùnda's entrance last year?" Tom rolled his eyes tiredly at me.

"More or less." Minerva replied distractedly, trying to stop me and Tom from bickering, "Once you're capable enough you can ward something without the need for runes, in the same way you can enchant or curse an object."

"Because you understand the symbols enough to use them only in your head?" I wondered, thinking about 'muffliato', a spell that Harry Potter used willy nilly even while he was on the run. But this explanation from Minerva actually erased several questions I had been unable to answer. It was the same principle behind my workings with fire during the previous academic year and my ritual in the summer. Keeping in mind the collection of meanings associated with fire had made me capable of simply bending the flame of the lit candle to my will, and the ritual... *bone and wand and blood...* I shuddered, and I didn't know if it was because of disgust or elation, forcing myself to focus on the environment around me.

"The difference between enchanting and warding are more in the classification of their effects than in anything else. Wards are placed over an area, and the most long-lasting tend to be tied to a fixed element within said area. They're anchored to a fixed element, and their effect is turned outwards, affecting something in their proximity." Riddle's tone had turned pedantic than, smirking subtly even as he didn't turn to face me, "Egyptians didn't bother hiding their wards, and displayed their hieroglyphs freely, but that was before Rome and the diffusion of wand-wavers."

"Rome was where wands actually got started?" I asked surprised, taking another sip from my chosen beverage, luxuriating in the taste for a moment. *Rome is responsible for the diffusion of wand-lore across the world.* That actually made sense, before the Statute of Secrecy, the supremacy of a country had to be somewhat intertwined with the local magical population, be they creatures or wizardkind. *Still, this doesn't explain why nobody mentioned this.*

"How could they conquer the world otherwise?" Minerva actually stopped whatever she was studying to look at me with something akin to disbelief: "You have the most curious lacunes in your knowledge, Rubeus."

"Well, there have been a lot of conquerors in history, Alexander, Temujin..." I frowned ignoring her gibe while slowly coming to a stop. The great conquerors were single people, it wasn't impossible that their charisma dragged in their wake some wizards willing to help them. Rome was a whole different thing: it was an empire that lasted through the generations, indicating some strong magical presence among the Romans' ranks. It was like comparing a single wave to the slow mounting of the tide.

"In the vast planes of Asia, witches and wizards were more focused on a tribal-like use of magic, rituals to the Sky and other half-religious things. And while the priests that followed Alexander's army were

wizards, they mostly believed their power to be given from the gods, and so far away from Greece, they didn't feel capable of much. Besides, Alexander's bouts of madness are well documented, from the curse he unleashed when he cut the Giordan Knot to the Fading Curse that killed him in the end. The local wizards broke the greek priests' wards over the army around the time fo Bucefalo's death." Riddle explained again.

"Why couldn't Binns talk about this stuff instead of goblins?" Minerva's rhetorical question did nothing to hide her academic interest, and spurned another question out of me.

"Because before Hogwarts there wasn't an actual sense of community of wizardkind, was it?" the realization struck me like lightning, children growing together, learning together, was bound to have *massive* effects on society. Before Hogwarts, magic was likely either self-taught, passed from master to apprentice, or kept within a single bloodline. But it was a fragmented knowledge, likely intermixed with half-baked ritualisms that didn't actually affect the magic itself, or that outright limited it.

Riddle's youthful face turned towards me with something akin to *respect* plastered on his features: "There was not."

I could picture it easily, in a younger world, one in which Human Rights weren't a thing, power was dangerous whenever it wasn't firmly grasped in your hand. That meant that families of wizards hid even from each other, at least until they felt capable enough to face a threat. But then again, there would be a family capable of Transfiguration, one capable of Potions, and so on. The sheer magnitude of Hogwarts' founding hadn't hit me yet. Historically, the creation of a community, that then evolved into the concept of 'magical people' was monumental.

"How old is Apparition? Or the magic of Portkey?" I frowned heavily as another piece of the strange world I was into fell into its place, before downing the first gulp of the alcoholic beverage I had chosen from my brews of the previous year. It was a silvery-white concoction, smooth and sweet: I remembered brewing it focusing moonlight into milk enriched by the tiniest amount of whiskey.

"Why do you ask?" Minerva turned her head sideways at my non-sequitur.

"Because what sense of kinship there can be between unknown families of magic practitioners when they're not limited to a single area?" I asked, noticing that Riddle's eyes shone with an understanding that had no place on the face of a 14 years old kid.

"There are, and likely were, many ways to travel large distances." he cautiously replied, "Even before wizards called them Apparition or Portkey. Why, there are many stories of doors that didn't lead anywhere in the vicinity."

"Before Hogwarts there wasn't an actual sense of community of wizardkind." I repeated dully, "Don't you see? This school changed the very world!"

"How?" Minerva sat on a freshly transfigured stone bench, letting out a discreet *yawn* before returning her attention to me.

"Because after voices of Hogwarts traveled across the world, wizards and witches everywhere, that by that time were at most of the dimension of small covens, were either envious or fearful of the implications. With adult mages to keep watch and instruct the children, the parents were free to attend their own business, to claim territory..." Riddle's voice explained the line of thought that I had just stumbled upon like it was obvious, revealing a terrifying insight into the workings of social groups.

Here's the wizard that turned the purist sentiment into the purist Movement. My brief bout of admiration for Tom died immediately as I thought about the war that he would eventually unleash: "So they built their own schools, mostly because at the time the more influential families of wizardkind were intertwined with the local muggle government. So there was an interest in forging the equivalent of a potential militant force capable of holding back invading wizards. It's no coincidence that the Roman Empire, at least the western one, fell in 476: by then the knowledge of wands was somewhat widespread, and the local provinces of the empire were eventually subsumed by local lords, which may have collaborated with a local branch of wizards."

"The Byzantine Empire fell almost a thousand years after that though." Tom's frown briefly displayed the effort he was putting in piecing together the history of the world in a different way than the methodical one depicted in books.

"And merely two hundred years after that we have the Statute of Secrecy." Minerva managed to catch up with our reasoning, displaying once more why she was a fucking badass, "Between 990 A.D. and 1692 A.D. enough communities of wizards formed around the world, and learned to communicate with each other enough to establish an organization to decide in the interest of the witches and wizards of the whole world."

"Liechtenstein isn't a member of the ICW." Tom noted with a smirk, explaining at once why my baffled 'why the fuck is it not?' had stolen a snort out of him: "The magical community of Liechtenstein protested because Bonaccord wanted to ban troll hunting and give rights to trolls. A tribe of Mountain Trolls had been causing a lot of trouble in Liechtenstein, so their wizarding community contested Bonaccord's appointment, and refused to join the Confederation as a result."

"Goblins too aren't members, are they?" I asked curiously, receiving a disdainful scoff from Minerva.

"Of course not, it's the International Confederation of *Wizards*."

"And yet the goblins manage wizardkind's gold." I pointed out, "Be careful of who you're disdainful of." I was still baffled by the mechanisms behind the use of Galleons. How did it make any sense that a job as relatively 'normal' as a bank fell completely under a single *species*' control? "Besides, I'm pretty sure that goblins have some kind of agreement with the ICW, otherwise there would be some other bank in Diagon, wouldn't it?"

Tom smiled mockingly at Minerva's reddened cheeks, making me wiggle my finger in his direction in an 'I'm-warning-you' fashion: "You shouldn't underestimate muggles either." I laughed softly while I stared at my Slytherin companion, who seemed repulsed by my words.

"Why? They're lesser in every way that counts, they..."

"They manage the impossible every day without the aid of magic." I swirled my glass with a smile on my lips: "Newton's Law, Electromagnetism... we don't really have to care about those, do we? We only need a little swish in order to ignore Physics. Instead, the muggles figured out how to harness those same principles. You know of their..."

"I know of their planes! I know how they rain fire and death indiscriminately! I know how their machines poison the air and clog the lungs!" he hissed, rage burning deep in his eyes, as the carefree tone of our conversation took a sharp dive for the worse.

"Their progress does appear to come at the price of others, doesn't it?" *Yeah, I'm not touching that topic with a ten-foot pole. Fucking hell, the bombings have started this year, have they not?* Nevertheless, I refused to give the 'let's kill everything' attitude of Riddle any room to breathe: "But then again, wizardkind sits upon the back of all the other magical races."

"That's... that's nonsense! Are you talking about creatures now? Maybe half-breeds too?"

"Do you know what defines 'sentience'?" I cut smoothly before he could start a tirade to leave my ears ringing. *And I really don't want to risk Minerva being seduced by whatever philosophy Riddle can pull off right now.*

"What?" Minerva had lagged a bit behind because of our sharp change of topic, but my non-sequitur gave her a comfortable excuse to ask for clarification without hurting her own pride.

Tom, which I knew couldn't care less about anyone but himself, simply frowned and turned his eyes towards the fire burning merrily in the fireplace as he finally stepped away from the wall and sat in his favorite armchair. My fellow Slytherin remained quiet, most likely because he wasn't willing to let anyone know about his sociopathic tendencies, understandably so. *If even he's aware of it.* I amended my previous thought. But for some reason, Tom Riddle didn't strike me as a... particularly self-aware person.

"Technically, even a tree is 'sentient', because it senses, in fact, the world around it." I gestured casually with one hand, "If we need to discriminate among living beings, which is somewhat mandatory unless we want to destroy the very idea of civilization worldwide, then you should focus on 'sapience'." *Fucking hell this brew is affecting me more than I thought.*

"Why would it be mandatory?" Minerva sat on her armchair next to the fire, eyeing me shrewdly while Tom expertly hid his natural reactions to the topic I had breached.

"We reshape the environment to please us. Both out of convenience, and because we can. But ants build their own anthills, do they not? In order to have a civilization of any kind, a people must bend a section of the environment, it doesn't matter if the people are nomad or if they stay still, by civilizing a land, the native wildlife pays the price."

"Should we live in mud-huts then?" Riddle scoffed before taking a sip from his glass of wine.

"Don't be deliberately obtuse, that's not the point. The point is, do we need to bend the world around us in order to make space for our civilization? The reasons don't truly matter in this conversation, it may be for resources or simply because it is a convenient location." I took a long gulp of my tankard, enjoying the buzzing warmth that it carried.

"Yeah, I can see what you're meaning, even if your delivery could use some work." Minerva turned her head to look into the fire, frowning lightly as she considered my words.

"And we agree that it is somewhat of a... *pity*, or outright waste, to ruin the life of someone else without reason?" I needed them, refusing to let the topic die uselessly.

"What are you going on about now?" Riddle sighed, carefully exuding the right mixture of pandering and annoyance to push anyone into changing topics, lest they appear an idiot.

Unfortunately for him, I couldn't care less about how I appeared: "Well, following my logic: we want civilization, so someone must pay the price, if only because of the limited nature of the world. Then we also agree that killing off portions of the planet, which include but are not limited to other races, either muggles or creatures or simple plants, is a waste. The next logical step would be to ensure that our civilization doesn't kill without need, and that when it does, only the less important things are killed."

"I don't think you can put the life of different beings on a scale and then decide which to sacrifice on the altar of your... how are you calling this philosophy of yours? Cheap Civilization?" Minerva sniped at my admittedly cold logic.

"The name of my half-drunk philosophy is meaningless for now, but focusing on your objection: if I were to kill a Hippogriff, you'd be sad, outraged, or something equally irritating. If I were to kill a bush of roses, however, nobody would bat an eye."

"You can't seriously think..." the Gryffindor witch appeared incensed.

"I don't. But you've made my point: what makes it worse to kill a hippogriff instead of a bush of roses? Is it the complexity of the creature? Is it because the beast is magical and you can pet it, while the roses have no inherent magic of their own and you can just as well smell another kind of flower?" I looked at her expectantly.

"But it's obvious!"

"If it's obvious there shouldn't be any problem with putting it into words." Tom pointed out, his eyes now thoughtfully staring into the fire.

"Is it because the hippogriff would feel pain? I assure you that plants feel pain, in their own way, only because they cannot scream, it doesn't mean that they don't mind." I insisted while taking another sip of my... *Moonsilk*. I decided, enjoying the smooth texture of the beverage. *I'm calling this one Moonsilk.*

"I hate when you get all philosophical." Minerva faux-huffed, but she seemed to enjoy the effort she had to put into our conversation. Talking about magic was always interesting, doing magic even more so, but I was the first one to breach the topic of 'philosophy'. Not many people, least of all teenagers, were prone to question the mentality of those around them or even their own as long as they were part of a group with the same ideas.

And the conversation flows so easily too! I was honestly curious about history, but being able to blatantly poke the mentality of the future Dark Lord, while dragging Minerva around for the ride, maybe making her think about something not Transfiguration-related, was a nice bonus.

"Though." I shrugged uncaringly as an answer to Minerva's faux-indignation. Admittedly, the beverage that I had affectionally called Moonsilk seemed to be singularly efficient in pushing one's mind towards self-analysis and general reminiscing of 'What-ifs'.

"You were talking about sentience earlier. You want a criterium upon which you can measure the worth of a species?" Tom clarified, receiving a nod as an answer.

"I appreciate that you're using the term 'species' instead of race."

"I'm not categorizing wizardkind with the same box as muggles." Tom scowled at my implication, making me snort.

"Sub-race then?" I mocked him, "Grindelwald would love to chat with you. Or even Hitler, now that I think about it."

"Sapience." Minerva frowned, guessing where I was going with my tipsy analysis of the world and our place in it.

"Yes! The muggles have tracked the origin of mankind, you know? Our species is named as Homo Sapiens. They've tracked what mankind was before our first appearance: Australopithecus, Homo Erectus, Homo Sapiens Neanderthalensis, Homo Sapiens, and finally Homo Sapiens Sapiens. But what is sapience?" I let the silence settle for a few seconds before straightening in my seat.

"Is it the ability to 'speak'? Parrots and Crows are capable of saying words, but that hardly qualifies them on the same plan of mankind, don't you think? Even an Acromantula, once it grows old enough, is capable of talking." I spoke remembered Aragog from the books of Harry Potter, "But I don't know if I'd place them on the same plan of Veela or Merpeople. Or even Sphinxes for that matter."

I took a deep gulp of my drink, finally finishing it, "And yet, I'd guess that phoenixes understanding of the world around us outstrips our own, wouldn't you agree?"

"You were aggravating by mere virtue of your existence, now it seems that you've actually engaged in being consciously annoying." Tom snapped as he rose from his seat, "I have... something to do."

As the Dark-lord to be fled from our verbal joust, I smiled in self-satisfaction. *You gave cognitive dissonance to a 14 years old orphan, feel proud of yourself, yeah, just like that.*

"You pushed him on purpose." Minerva pursed her lips with a reprimanding tone.

"I did." I admitted, "He needed to address the bombings of London sooner rather than later." I tried to justify myself.

"Bombings?"

"Who is now the one with curious lacunes in her knowledge?" I grinned at the Griffindor witch, before eyeing contemplatively my reserves of beverages.

"I think you've drunk enough." she stopped me before I could summon anything.

"Sorry," I smiled self-deprecatingly, "with all the extra potions that I'm brewing with Tom, the less time we spend this close to each other, the better. Luckily the Felix will need to rest for the entirety of December, so I'll be able to leave for Winter Break." *I need to start traveling towards Albania, and it will be line-of-sight teleportation for now. I need to set up checkpoints to speed up my traveling in any case. Didn't Harry Potter side-apparate a dying Dumbledore across the country in his sixth year?*

"I admit I am somewhat jealous at the thought of private advanced lessons with a professor." Minerva scrunched her nose while her eyes turned towards my carefully labeled brews, "I can only imagine how would it be to do the same with professor Dumbledore..."

"Well, it's not exactly rainbows and unicorns, you know? We basically run around in order to shorten the time needed to brew stuff that Slughorn then sells to St. Mungo, and many of those brews have to be completed at night under the open sky." I tried to deflect.

"By the way, how does it go with the Animagus thing?" I asked, deciding to address the wistful tone in my friend's voice instead of simply ignoring it, "Tom and I helped set up the research, but then between my brews, the Runda, and whatever Tom does in his free time we kind of left you alone to punch through tome after tome."

"I'm done with the theory." she admitted with a thin smile, "and I'm comfortable enough with animal-to-animal transfiguration that I was going to get started soon with human to animal, but I'd prefer to have some solid ability with Transfiguration-Reversal before attempting stuff on myself."

That's fucking advanced. I thought with a whistle. As Dumbledore said: reversing a transfiguration wasn't something that your everyday joe could hope to master. *I really have to read through N.E.W.T. Transfiguration Theory.*

"That calls for a celebration then!" I rose from my seat with little to no wobbling due to the alcohol I had ingested, "You're a 15 years old Scottish witch! I say it's high time that you taste my whiskey-based brews!"

AN

Okay, another piece of worldbuilding here, a bit of character exploration setting the general tone for the academic year. You'll see what the MC managed to obtain as a result of his summer's ritual in the next chapter, because as he stated, he's hopping home for the holidays.

As I've said, I don't want to make this fic entirely and only about magic like I did for 'The Bigger Picture', for a variety of reasons. So I'm using the routine at Hogwarts to set up character interaction and a bit of world-building, while it's obvious that the true adventures will be outside of the school, like the summer's ritual. There is no adventure-plot for regular years spent at school unless you enjoy teen-angst and drama (which is not my case), and if the Forbidden Forest was actually deadly for the students, I'm supposing that there would be some kind of actual magical barrier between it and the castle. Given the fact that canon!hagrid went in there to punch trolls, that Harry&co went in and out on yearly basis, and that Fred and George are openly reprimanded that Forbidden actually means Forbidden, but are otherwise left alone by the staff, I'm short of things to throw at the MC to make his schooling years life-threatening and thusly particularly engaging.

I've seen countless Snape!mentor or Dumbledore!mentor fics, but not one in which Slughorn actually teaches: so in this chapter we see the first open maneuvers he does to reach out to a student aware enough to spot manipulation when it's thrown at his face.

Is Minerva changed enough to affect her Animagus form? What should she become? Ideas?

