

As Tom waltzed down the stairs of the shop, wand in hand, he felt power surging through him, like nothing he had ever felt before. Another group of his greatest rivals had been removed from the competition, another hurdle had been destroyed and another battle won. When he saw the sight of his handiwork before him, a smirk appeared on his face, he was invincible and he wasn't stopping anytime soon. Nobody was yet to defeat him and nobody ever would, he held more power than any wizard before him and any wizard after him.

Despite the best efforts of his victims, they were weak, they stood no chance against him, the same as all of his previous victims. They were all mere toys to him, he could manipulate them, play them, challenge them, he could do whatever he wanted so that's exactly what he did. He could end their lives in a split second but that removed from the fun of the experience, that removed the thrill of the chase. As Tom had taken the lives of more of his foolish challengers, he had become more creative with his methods, exploring a variety of options and never repeating methods.

Since his days at Hogwarts, Tom had only become stronger. The Knights of Walpurgis had expanded and before he knew it, Tom had bred almost an entire generation of soldiers, waiting to follow his every command. He was in control of everything, he had no worthy opposition, he had an army of loyal followers, he had everything.

Within a split-second, Tom apparated out of the shop and found himself outside of his property; Malfoy Manor. A home passed down through generations that had been donated to him by his followers and had quickly become the Knights of Walpurgis' base. He strolled across the cobbled path, through the front door, and took his rightful seat at the head of the table, glaring down at an array of his most loyal of followers.

"Master," they called, bowing before him and their seats at the dining table.

"Black, any new recruits since the latest recruitment party?" He began, looking down the table until his eyes locked on Astrea Black.

"Yes Master, we have over thirty new possible members wishing to be accepted by you." Astrea Black brandished a list from her robe, offering it up to Tom who snatched it immediately. "Each one has a significant amount of wealth they are willing to donate to the army, in exchange for acceptance. Many also have rather useful ties to employees at the Ministry of Magic which I believe may be useful for later missions, they are all waiting in the basement for your approval."

"Very well, I will approve the useful. He placed the list down on the table, looking back up at Astrea, "kill the weak." He nodded at Astrea, a sparkle appearing in her eyes from the moment he opened his mouth.

"Malfoy, what's the news on my position at Hogwarts?" Tom called, rising from his seat and glaring straight down into the eyes of Abraxas Malfoy.

Despite Malfoy being the longest standing and most loyal servant of Tom, his lip still quivered when he spoke, "Master, there seems to have been a miscommunication between me and Professor Dumbledore, he seems to believe your job at Hogwarts is a question rather than a statement, he is adamant that the position cannot be yours. I believe he is not fully understanding the repercussions of his actions, a problem which I would be honoured to resolve." He bowed whilst muttering his final sentence, looking down at the table to avoid the glare of his Master.

"Malfoy, this has been a problem for days and you are still yet to resolve it," He began, slamming his hands against the wooden table and sending a shiver down the spine of Abraxas Malfoy. "Since you seem to be utterly incompetent, I will take the matter into my own hands and pay a personal visit to Professor Dumbledore to ensure that he fully understands the situation, something that you have clearly been too foolish to complete yourself. Another failure like this Malfoy, and we will be having much larger problems than this." He warned, waving his wand and sending a surge of magic rushing towards Malfoys hand, crushing the bones with one swift motion.

Malfoy knew better than to react, he had become used to feeling regular pain since leaving Hogwarts and the safest way to react was not to react at all. "Yes Master, absolutely." He bowed once more, clutching his hands to his chest and returning his vision to the table before him.

Tom gave his followers the once over before calling them all to rise before him, "Tonight, we will ambush a muggle village to the east and we will not take any prisoners. We will not show any mercy, we with be ruthless and you will follow my every command. You will serve me, and soon I will take my rightful place, ruling over all magic and non-magic folk. Soon I will be immortal."

His army of followers bowed before him, "Yes Master," they echoed across the room before following him out of the Malfoy Manor.

The army marched in synchronization, following loyally behind Tom who stood at the front, leading his army to a bloodbath. His arm raised to the side of him and he shot out vibrant red sparks from the tip of his wand, warning everyone of the hell he was about to unleash.

The revolution had only just begun.

Carnage followed Tom wherever he went. His siege in Nottingham went exactly as his previous battles had gone, without a hitch.

Thousands of muggles and wizards were cornered with nowhere to go. Tom's army was invincible and nobody stood a chance against him. Those who were smart fell to their knees and surrendered, those who weren't were pushed down, with barely the chance to breathe before they were hit with a flash of green.

Over the years of building his army, Tom had learnt exactly how they worked. Like an army general, he had intensive battle plans that always worked. He knew where his subjects' strengths lay and he made them do exactly that. Information that could be taken was and for those without information, Tom was more merciful. He needed nothing from them, they were simply pawns caught in the wrong game of chess, but leaving them alive could give them the power to kill the Queen.

Tom almost enjoyed being involved in the action. Despite being unable to feel joy, he assumed it would feel similar to how he felt after taking a life. The electricity that surged through his body would debilitate anyone but for him, it enhanced his power. After each kill, he was stronger. After each muggle fell to the ground, he rose higher up. Watching people fall gave him the steps he needed to reach the top and he wouldn't stop until he controlled everything. As each body fell to their knees, he used them as steps to reach his next goal. No death was useless to him, he planned strategically in a way that few others could. He wanted people to know his name but he wasn't ready yet. He knew there was nobody else with skills like his, but hiding his identity in a siege was easy: he left not a single witness.

Tom knew he would soon be ready for the world to know his name, but whilst he wasn't, he used copycat tactics in battle. He would march on towns and cities in ways he had seen before, he would kill in the sorts of ways he could only ever have imagined, he would leave no one left alive.

As he walked through the burning streets of Nottingham, he felt power surging through him. Heat from the flames travelled through his body, igniting a fire in his heart and a thirst for

more. Power was something he knew he could have, he knew there was almost nothing out of reach for him and he knew others would give themselves up rather than fight him but that wasn't what he wanted. He didn't want it easy, he didn't want to be handed his success on a plate like thousands of others before him, he wanted to take what was rightfully his, no matter what the cost.

Watching a muggle plead for their life made him feel in control. He could manipulate them to feel however he wanted, he could make them do whatever he wished and that gave him the power he craved. He knew he could simply kill them with one fell swoop of his wand, but that gave him no satisfaction. He enjoyed the feeling of taking rather than receiving. He needed to make a statement with each death, each siege grew bigger and more elaborate than the one before, drawing the attention that Tom craved. He was an artist and he didn't want his work going unnoticed.

Flashes of green flew across the muddy battlefield, each one barely covering the sound of the screams that came before. With each flick of his wand, another muggle fell to the ground and his body count grew higher. Tom edged forwards with each kill, his army following close behind, pushing forward to the centre of the town where his objective was awaiting. Sieges were never particularly difficult for Tom, he and his army could take out a whole town in minutes, leaving nothing but rubble behind. But Tom was a performer, each siege was a show and he demanded a standing ovation. He wanted the crowd throwing roses and calling out his name as he left and that's exactly what he got. Every siege got front page media coverage, after each siege he grew more and more powerful. Hundreds of wizards and witches would pledge their life to him, to the future that he promised for them, without a second thought. They worshipped at his altar and threw all the roses he demanded.

As he entered the centre of town, his objective was in sight. With his army keeping his objective free of bystanders, he knew it would be an easy retrieval. He navigated through the narrow, winding streets, disposing of all passers by with the simple silent flick of his wand. He followed the exact route he had memorised until he found himself at the bottom of the stairs of the Town Hall. Wand poised, Tom made his way up the cobbled steps and waltzed straight in through the front doors. He could instantly tell that the infrastructure had been designed by muggles, the architecture was far inferior to that of the Malfoy Manor and the design had no logic. Pillars stood where pillars shouldn't, causing Tom's annoyance at muggles to grow further. They were by far inferior to him, even unable to build simple infrastructure without making tremendous architectural mistakes.

The hall was deserted. Papers flew across the cobbled floor, with each gush of wind sending them flying further and further away. Tom knew the kind of information he needed wouldn't be written down, he knew exactly who would hold it and he knew they would be waiting for him. From the way the siege had begun, any bystander would be able to tell who was behind it, any wizard who read the runes would know the flee the scene but he knew this one wouldn't. He knew this one would want in on the action.

Despite the loudness of the screams from the streets, Tom could clearly hear one pair of footsteps upstairs, rushing across the building from room to room. Closing his eyes, he locked onto the sound, almost able to picture exactly who was moving upstairs. As a predator, Tom had always enjoyed the adrenaline that came with a chase, but after hours of chasing worthless muggles, he was tired. He wanted what he came for and he wanted it now.

"You cannot hide." He called, his voice echoing through the building. "I will leave here with exactly what I want. You will either surrender the information to me, or I will take it by any means necessary. We both know you don't want to die." With each word, he took a stride closer to the grand staircase before him. "I'm coming up now, you best be ready and willing to sacrifice the information you have, I'm not feeling all too lenient right now."

Tom rarely spoke to his victims. When the siege began, they knew it was them that he was here to find, they knew what he wanted and that their fate was already sealed. Pleading for their lives was futile and they knew it, but Tom knew this one was different. They weren't ready to die yet, he needed them to collect more information for him, and he knew that they would. Even though they wouldn't know what they were doing, he knew all too well that they would oblige.

He made his way up the staircase, his shoes colliding with each step, warning his victim of where he was and how fast he was approaching. By the time he was at the top of the stairs, the footsteps running around had stopped. Not a single sound came from the inside of the Town Hall.

Tom drowned out the sounds of the battle unfolding in the streets. Every death was meaningless to him until he got what he wanted. He had come to Nottingham with the sole hopes of retrieving confidential information and he wouldn't leave until it was his. Tom followed the corridor in the direction he last heard footsteps, his wand ready to strike if he felt any resistance. He stalked silently along the corridor until he came to a door, held shut with only a simple spell.

Tom, like the brightest witches and wizards, could use non verbal magic. With a simple flick of his wand, the door unlocked with a clicking sound, revealing an office. Tom entered the room, observing his surroundings with a quick glance around it. Rows upon rows of documents were laid out on a wooden table, stacked neatly into piles, the word confidential printed across each and every sheet. Tom fumbled with the documents, flipping the pages over and scanning each one. He knew what he needed would not have been written down but nevertheless, his curiosity took control.

After carefully scanning each pile, he inched forwards towards the monstrous bookshelf that lined the walls. Books were strategically placed upon the shelf coordinated by colour, with each muted tone fading into the next, all stood tall like a soldier reporting for duty, all except one.

As soon as Tom manoeuvred the novel, he heard a click identical to the one that had opened the door. On command, the wall of bookshelves began to pull apart, causing Tom to raise his wand in preparation for the guest on the other side. When the bookshelves had parted all that they would, Tom took a step forwards, and then another.

He saw her almost instantly after the first step forwards. Her auburn hair tumbled down her shoulders and her face took on the exact expression he had expected, fear. Neither of them said a word as their eyes locked onto each others and the girls face fell. SHe appeared just as she had all those years ago.

"It's been far too long Evelyn."

Evelyn didn't utter a word. Her bushy eyebrows raised as she gave Tom the once over, unsure of what she was truly seeing. She'd read the news, she knew what he was after but she never truly expected to see him.

In the silence, Tom's eyes began to wander until they settled on the wall behind her. Newspaper clippings, school photos and official documents were plastered across the wall, each and everyone with his face on.

"Someone's done their homework," he whispered, taking another step towards her. "Quite an impressive collection you have here, it seems you've been following me well. Nice to see

you're interested in my life after Hogwarts but it's a shame you haven't kept up to date on anyone else." Tom knew all about her. He'd been trailing her for months and he knew exactly what was going on in her life. "Although I guess not everyone else is as interesting as me Evelyn."

Evelyn didn't move. Not a single muscle in her body reacted to his presence until on instinct, she drew her wand.

"Evelyn, I'm not sure your skills in Charms are enough to disarm me. In fact, I'm not quite sure anyone's are." Tom swished his wand and disarmed her without a second thought sending her wand flying into his hand. "I think it's time to get down to business."

Finally, she spoke. "The Ministry told me that you'd be looking for me." Her voice was different than Tom remembered, deeper and more mellow.

His expression shifted as if remembering something. "I did was expect them to warn you when they told you what they did. I thought you'd be a bit happier to see me after all these years though Evelyn, we shared such magical years together at school."

"We didn't speak." She spat at him. "You didn't get involved with anyone outside of Slytherin because you were too superior for them, didn't want to be mixing with anything other than royalty, did you? All I remember is you getting that poor boy Rubeus suspended for something I highly doubt he did."

"Hagrid got the punishment he deserved for keeping such a vicious beast at school. The punishment suited the crime, I mean he did kill someone Evelyn, or don't you remember?"

"Everyone at Hogwarts now knows that's a lie. I don't know how you kept us all wrapped around your finger for seven whole years." Although Evelyn still felt fear, she felt herself allowing her body to relax, even though she was in the presence of a known killer. "We both know what you're here for and we both know I'm not at liberty to give you that information."

Tom almost smirked as Evelyn began to dominate the conversation. He recalled their days at Hogwarts when she had attempted to do the same but with much less success. Although Tom had much to say, he found himself keeping his mouth shut as Evelyn began to talk again.

"By now, the Ministry will know about where you are and they'll have sent a team ready to take you down." Evelyn found herself pacing up and down as she spoke, as though she were

concocting some sort of plan. "They've sent teams before and by the time they get here, you're always gone so by no doubt, you'll do the same this time. If I give up this information willingly, I'll lose my job."

"If you don't, you'll most likely lose your life," Tom added.

Evelyn noted how uncertain Tom seemed to be, slowing down her pacing and halting before him. "Most likely doesn't seem very decisive. If you wanted me dead, I'm sure you would have done it by now."

"Good observation Evelyn, you never used to be this observant during our time at Hogwarts. But nonetheless, I do need the location of Hepzibah and I know you've been tasked with hiding her."

Evelyn already knew what would happen. When she was tasked with hiding Hepzibah, she was made fully aware of what would happen when Tom Riddle came looking. Not if, but when. She thought he would have killed her already, but for some reason, she was still alive. "What do you need with Hepzibah?"

"You really are the same as at Hogwarts aren't you? You just go along with whatever the Ministry tell you and get nothing in return. You don't ask enough questions and you clearly don't get enough answers." He said, his eyes scanning the wall behind Evelyn.

Instinctively, Evelyn turned herself to face the wall behind her. Years of hard work were sprawled out across it, each one providing a clue into Tom Riddle's new lifestyle after Hogwarts.

"Hepzibah has something of interest to me. I heard she'd been collecting treasures and I do enjoy someone that shares a similar passion to me. Perhaps we'd be able to have a discussion about them together, maybe share our findings and favourite treasures."

Evelyn knew all about Hepzibah. She could recall everything that Hepzibah had been doing for the past two years but she couldn't put her finger on what Tom needed from her. She was elderly, with nothing other than money in her possession and Evelyn knew Tom Riddle didn't need money. He didn't buy things, he simply gained possession of them in other ways.

"Well, you won't be getting her location from me, Tom. I suggest you look elsewhere." Evelyn felt her fingers sliding into her pocket, looking for her wand to strike him. Once she

realised it was empty, her face fell, her eyes locking onto her wand laying flat on the ground on the other side of the room. She wasn't getting out of this easily.

"I enjoy you, Evelyn. Although you might not remember, we were closer than you thought at Hogwarts and it does truly pain me to do this, but you have left me with no choice."

Before Tom could even say the word, Evelyn knew what was coming. She knew that he would use an unforgivable on her, however, she almost hoped it would be the worst.

With his wand poised, Tom recalled the one word Evelyn did not want to hear, "Crucio."

Evelyn didn't even have time to blink before she fell to the floor. Her whole body writhed in pain as though a razor blade was slowly slicing through it. Each second was another cut, sending electricity flowing through her body, enough to make her think she might explode. Her thoughts were racing faster than the speed of light, her eyes unable to focus on a single thing.

Tom watched on at Evelyn as her body began to almost convulse on the floor. He had seen the effects of the Crucio curse many times and was unsurprised by what he was watching, however, he felt a peculiar interest in watching. He was interested in the way her body seemed to move, as though a rhythm was flowing through her veins, attempting to escape.

Although Evelyn had promised herself that the information wouldn't come from her, she felt words slipping to the end of the tongue, ready to be spoken. "B-" She began, a sharp grunt cutting her off.

"Ready to talk?" He questioned, ending the curse and staring down at her. He crouched down to her level, observing his handiwork. Beads of sweat had collected on her face, blending into a peculiar mixture with the salty tears that fell from her face. Although the pain was over, her body still shook uncontrollably.

Evelyn shook her head at Tom. She wouldn't give in just yet, there was still some fight left in her. She knew she wasn't yet at breaking point, her mind was too strong for him to simply explore it and extract the information he desired.

"I guess we can go again then," And with that, the pain started again.

Evelyn felt as though her skull was shrinking, putting pressure on her brain and forcing information to the front of her mind; she knew it wouldn't be long now until he could penetrate her force field. Soon Tom would have access to the unlimited information stored inside of her mind, the information she had been told to guard with her life. As the pain shot through her body, each and every one of her muscles spasmed in turn, the respective part of her body twitching as the pain moved. Evelyn never had, and never would again experience pain like this.

Evelyn began to feel herself fading away, her eyes becoming heavy as the pain became too much. She was a candle without any flame left in her, the only sign of life left were the embers surrounding her, fading away as the light began to leave her eyes. At this point, she knew Tom was inside her mind.

As she closed her eyes, she began to see again. The inside of her mind was wide open and Tom Riddle had taken her inside. She stood watching as he scoured for information regarding Hepzibah. His hands traced the countless bookshelves that lined her mind, his eyes scanning for the book that he required. His eyes floated back and forth between the bookshelves and the screen that seemed to be replaying Evelyn's memories before him. He saw her greatest achievements flashing across the screen, as though they'd been recorded by someone else and then inserted into a DVD player. He saw her opening her OWL results, becoming a prefect and getting her job, each one presenting her with a glorious smile, the kind he could only imagine.

As his eyes flickered back to the bookshelf, he found himself grinding to a halt, his feet stopping dead in their tracks and his hands reaching forwards towards exactly what he had been looking for. His fingers curled around the spine of the book he knew Evelyn had sworn to protect as he swooped the information into his jacket and disappeared.

Evelyn watched on as he faded from her mind, vanishing as though he had never been there. She felt herself turning to face the screen, almost compelled to revisit her memories, a sense of longing filling her body. If this was how she died, she wanted to go out remembering what she'd sworn she would never forget. As her eyes locked onto the screen, she watched herself prying open an envelope she recognised all too well as her OWL results. She watched as her past self pulled out the results with tears filling her eyes as she saw each and every result coming out as Outstanding.

Then, she saw herself with her parents. Holding their hands as she discovered magic for the first time, hope glimmering in her eyes as she grasped hold of her first wand. As the memory

began to fade away, she longed for it to return, for her to be able to spend one last moment with the people she loved, but alas the image shifted.

As the image of the Christmas Ball at Hogwarts began to form, Evelyn remembered the event all too well. A fiery glow covered her as she danced with her best friends, fairies fluttering around her as she swayed along to the beat of the band. Suddenly the image shifted as though her mind experienced an error in the memory. Instead of Evelyn dancing with her friends, she saw her own hand being taken by Tom Riddle. The man who was about to kill her had just placed a kiss on her extended arm. As his hand interlocked with hers, the image faded from the screen as Evelyn began to feel lost in her mind.

Working at Borgin and Burkes was exactly what Tom Riddle had needed after leaving Hogwarts. Although he was offered positions of higher importance to society, Tom had quite contently taken a job at Borgin and Burkes. He knew that the job suited him far better than any other ever could. Every day, he successfully attempted to convince wealthy witches and wizards to part with their valuable heirlooms, from trophies to locket.

During his time working there, he had been able to secure hundreds of valuable items into his possession, assessing each one before deciding whether or not he would swipe it for himself. Valuables that he took were kept in a vault at Malfoy Manner, ready for a second assessment closer to the creation of each one of his horcruxes.

After his siege in Nottingham, Tom Riddle knew exactly where to find Hepzibah Smith and with one quick piece of mail, he had been able to convince her to meet with him at Borgin and Burkes to assess the possible prices of her valuables. As usual, Tom was expecting to use his charm to convince Hepzibah to hand over her valuables to him. He had spent months prior investigating all about Hepzibah's life and had found her perfect.

Tom Riddle's charm worked with almost everyone, but he found females especially were far easier to manipulate. Those older than him were also easier than individuals younger than him, they were less agile, less able to defend themselves against his attacks. They were often more open to his charm, more willing to talk with him and share information about their lives. Hepzibah was the perfect target for him.

Tom began his day at work as he always did, early. Twenty minutes before he was expected to be there, Tom was already stood behind the counter. Coming to work early allowed him to inspect the collections from previous days that he had not been able to see. He was able to

identify how much each item was worth and how valuable it would be to him, allowing him to swipe anything that took his fancy without anybody else noticing.

Today's collection was rather bare, with only a few new necklaces in the chest below him. Each one almost identical: a long silver chain with small diamonds studded along it, the chains meeting together at a spherical metallic ball. Although they were hideous to look at, he could just by looking at the diamonds that it was expensive.

"Good morning Tom. Early for your shift again?" A male voice bellowed as he entered the room.

"Morning Mr Dragee, I enjoy admiring the new additions to the collection before everyone else you see." Tom smiled, something he had been able to perfect during his time at Hogwarts. Despite not enjoying smiling, he found it made others more open to him and being more open made them more easy to manipulate. Whilst at Hogwarts, Tom had practiced social interactions with his teachers, each year coming back more charming than before after a summer of watching others and mimicking their actions. As the majority of his teachers had grown fond of him, Tom had found them easy targets to practice social interactions on, always willing to talk and more excitable by Toms false compliments. His practice at school had come in handy at work more often than not, however, when it came to his other life, social skills were not compulsory.

"Ahh..." Mr Dragee sighed, going to join Tom behind the counter. "Rather hideous to the natural eye but reach in my boy, let me show you."

Upon his command, Tom slid his hand into the glass display unit, looping his fingers around the chain and pulling it up to extend it. Mr Dragee took the metal sphere in his hand, pushing his it closer to Tom. "Unlock it." He whispered, his voice almost giddy with excitement.

Although Tom was all too skilled at non-verbal magic, he preferred to keep that skill more hidden. With one swift movement, he had his wand out of his pocket, "Alohamora." He manoeuvred his wand in the appropriate way and the sphere began to change. The once smooth metal now had one continuous slit down the side of it that popped open, splitting the sphere in half and revealing the centre. Floating in the centre of the hollowed-out half was a small phial, filled with a clear liquid to the brim. Instinctively, Tom reached his hand out and then stopped, looking at Mr Dragee for permission as though he was a schoolboy again. With one swift nod, Mr Dragee gave his permission and almost immediately Tom's fingers grasped the phial.

He pulled it close to him, twisting open the lid and bringing it to his nose. "Not too close, it's powerful stuff." Warned Mr Dragee, watching Tom with an eager eye as he lifted the potion to his face and leant in for a sniff. His whole face recoiled in disgust at the stench. "Poison."

"A rather powerful one as well Tom. I have studied poisons and potions for years and even I do not recognise it. I assume it to be foreign or made by house-elves who simply cannot understand instructions." He said as he took the phial from Tom's hands, a little too aggressively, and began to reassemble the necklace.

"What kind of effects would it have on its victim? Do you think it would be fatal to consume?" Tom asked quickly.

"Well," Began Mr Dragee, opening up the glass cabinet to secure the necklace again. "Judging by the strength of the smell, it would kill almost instantly. However, the victim would almost certainly have to willingly drink it due to the pungency of the poison."

"Do you believe the stench could be covered up though, perhaps by the smell of cocoa or tea?" Tom leaned in closer to Mr Dragee.

"Well, perhaps my boy but as I am yet to see such poison in use, it would be almost impossible to guess." He rushed the last few words, clearly ready for the conversation to end at once. "Could you open up, I have a few pieces of business to attend to?"

Tom nodded, flashing Mr Dragee his usual charming smile and heading towards the front door. With one flick of his wand, the sign flipped to display the 'Open' sign to passers-by. He quickly returned to his post behind the glass cabinet, reaching beneath it to ensure that the money bank was still there, safely locked away.

Work was usually slow for Tom; with not many wealthy witches and wizards left alive, very few people entered and exited the shop. Most customers usually just came to browse, or if they were more elderly sometimes they just wanted to chat, often with made-up stories about their past to prolong the discussion. Tom wasn't one for small talk and he was usually able to see immediately whether or not a story was genuine, if it wasn't he would direct them to any other employee, however on the rare instance that they told the truth, he was more than willing to listen; getting to know powerful witches and wizards was highly beneficial for his extracurricular activities.

At the sound of a bell Tom's eyes locked onto the front door of the shop which swung open gracefully to reveal a rather plump, old lady. Despite knowing full well had entered the shop, it took Tom a double-take to truly recognise them.

"Young boy, is it you that I am here to see?" She hobbled in through the door, a small house elf following closely behind her.

"I do believe it is." He met her halfway across the shop floor and extended his hand. "Tom Riddle."

"Hepzibah Smith, and that young fool is Hokey."

On Tom's fifth visit to Hepzibah Smith, he got what he had been waiting for. He unlocked the secret he had been searching for, one of the final puzzle pieces he needed fell into its place.

"Hurry up, Hokey!" said Hepzibah imperiously. "He said he'd come at four, it's only a couple of minutes to and he's never been late yet!" She quickly powder puffed her face one last time, looking in the mirror with a pout. "How do I look?" said Hepzibah, turning her head to admire the various angles of her face in the mirror.

"Lovely, madam," squeaked Hokey.

When the doorbell rang, both Hepzibah and Hokey jumped. "Quick, quick, he's here, Hokey!" cried Hepzibah and the elf scurried out of the room with difficulty, narrowly avoiding the large piles of lacquered boxes, orbs, globes and various flourishing potted plants in brass containers.

The house-elf returned within minutes, followed by a plainly dressed Tom, a bunch of roses tucked underneath his arm. He picked his way through the cramped room with an air that showed he had visited many times before and bowed low over Hepzibah's fat little hand, brushing it with his lips. "I brought you flowers," he said quietly.

"You naughty boy, you shouldn't have!" squealed old Hepzibah as though she had not been expecting them, but the empty vase prepared on the nearest little table said otherwise. "You do spoil this old lady, Tom...Sit down, sit down...Where's Hokey? Ah..." The house-elf had come dashing back into the room carrying a tray of little cakes, which she set at her mistress's elbow. "Help yourself, Tom," said Hepzibah, "I know how you love my cakes. Now, how are you? You look pale. They overwork you at that shop, I've said it a hundred times..." He

smiled mechanically and Hepzibah simpered. "Well, what's your excuse for visiting this time?" she asked, battering her lashes.

"Mr. Burke would like to make an improved offer for the goblin-made armor," said Tom. "Five hundred Galleons, he feels it is a more than fair —"

"Now, now, not so fast, or I'll think you're only here for my trinkets!" pouted Hepzibah.

"I am ordered here because of them, I am only a poor assistant, madam, who must do as he is told. Mr Burke wishes me to inquire —"

"Oh, Mr Burke, phooey!" said Hepzibah, waving a little hand. "I've something to show you that I've never shown Mr Burke! Can you keep a secret, Tom? Will you promise you won't tell Mr Burke I've got it? He'd never let me rest if he knew I'd shown it to you, and I'm not selling, not to Burke, not to anyone! But you, Tom, you'll appreciate it for its history, not how many Galleons you can get for it."

"I'd be glad to see anything Miss Hepzibah shows me," he inched closer to her, watching as she gave another girlish giggle.

I had Hokey bring it out for me...Hokey, where are you? I want to show Mr Riddle our finest treasure...In fact, bring both, while you're at it..."

"Here, madam," squeaked the house-elf, carrying two leather boxes, one piled on top of the other.

"Now," said Hepzibah happily, taking the boxes from the elf, laying them in her lap, and preparing to open the topmost one, "I think you'll like this, Tom...Oh, if my family knew I was showing you...They can't wait to get their hands on this!" She opened the lid. "I wonder whether you know what it is, Tom? Pick it up, have a good look!" whispered Hepzibah, and Tom stretched out a long-fingered hand and lifted the cup by one handle out of its snug silken wrappings.

For a moment, Tom's eyes gleamed red, his expression curiously mirroring Hepzibah's. "A badger," he murmured as he examined the engraving "Then this was...?"

"Helga Hufflepuff's, as you very well know, you clever boy!" said Hepzibah, leaning forward with a loud creaking of corsets and actually pinching his hollow cheek. "Didn't I tell you I

was distantly descended? This has been handed down in the family for years and years. Lovely, isn't it? And all sorts of powers it's supposed to possess too, but I haven't tested them thoroughly, I just keep it nice and safe in here..." She hooked the cup back off Tom's long forefinger and restored it gently to its box, too intent upon settling it carefully back into position to notice the shadow that crossed Tom face as the cup was taken away.

"Now then," said Hepzibah happily, "where's Hokey? Oh yes, there you are — take that away now, Hokey." The elf obediently took the boxed cup, and Hepzibah turned her attention to the much flatter box in her lap. "I think you'll like this even more, Tom," she whispered. "Lean in a little, dear boy, so you can see...Of course, Burke knows I've got this one, I bought it from him, and I daresay he'd love to get it back when I'm gone..."

She slid back the fine filigree clasp and flipped open the box. Thereupon the smooth crimson velvet lay a heavy golden locket. Tom reached out his hand, without invitation this time, and held it up to the light, staring at it. "Slytherin's mark," he said quietly, as the light played upon an ornate, serpentine S.

"That's right!" said Hepzibah, delighted, apparently, at the sight of Tom gazing at her locket, transfixed. "I had to pay an arm and a leg for it, but I couldn't let it pass, not a real treasure like that, had to have it for my collection. Burke bought it, apparently, from a ragged-looking woman who seemed to have stolen it, but had no idea of its true value —"

She reached out to take the locket back. "So there you are, Tom, clear, and I hope you enjoyed that!" She looked him full in the face, her foolish smile faltering slightly "Are you all right, dear?"

"Oh yes," said Tom quietly. "Yes, I'm very well..."

"I thought — but a trick of the light, I suppose —" said Hepzibah, looking unnerved. Tom knew he had seen it; he had seen the red gleam in her eyes and there was little hope left for her. "Here, Hokey, take these away and lock them up again...the usual enchantments..."

Tom Riddle already knew that he would kill Hepzibah before he even met her. He had been planning it for months and when inspiration had struck in the morning, he finally had his weapon.

"I do apologise for her, she's reaching her expiration date." She smiled at Tom, looking back at the house-elf behind her who seemed to be caught in a daze. "Now, where are we going?" She looked around the small shop, returning her gaze to the boy shortly after.

"Do follow me." He led her up a short winding staircase into the attic. "Hot chocolate?" He asked, turning to her and pointing her towards a seat.

"Oh absolutely boy. I always appreciate a warm drink before a discussion." She took her seat and watched as Tom Riddle prepared her drink, adding various powders and liquids into a large mug. She took a swig of her hot chocolate. "Wonderful cocoa you've made me. You must tell me the secret ingredient, it tastes divine." She gulped again from her mug. "Let's get down to business then boy, I have places to be."

"Well, I wouldn't have reached out to you if you weren't of interest to me. You see, I have a great interest in ancient treasures or historical artefacts and once I heard about the ones in your possession, I simply had to verify it. Although Borgin and Burkes would be filled with pride if you sold or donated your artefacts, simply viewing them would be such a great pleasure. It would be interesting simply to hear about them if you would feel comfortable with that." He crossed his hands in his lap, leaning forward as though he were interested in what Hepzibah was about to say.

"Alright boy. Listen closely because I likely won't repeat this, when my parents were made aware that I was descended from Helga Hufflepuff, they were killed almost instantly. It was put down to a random killing, but you and I both know that wouldn't be true."

Sensing now would be the time to be empathetic, Tom placed a hand on her shoulder. "I know how you must feel, I never knew my parents. I didn't even know I was a wizard until I was invited to Hogwarts."

"Oh my boy, it is tough isn't it?" Her hand held his on her shoulder momentarily. "Anyway, soon after that, people started knocking on my door, powerful people that I wasn't ready to deal with yet. For most of my life, I've had to run from those who wished to exploit me. Relatives even taught me dark magic to protect myself on the rare occasion that I might need it. A few years ago, I opened my door and sat outside was a giant parcel. No note, no nothing which I found to be rather rude of the sender mind you. Inside that parcel was Helga Hufflepuffs cup and nothing else. I expected a note or something but nevertheless, I knew that it being in my possession meant that it was mine to protect. With a bit of help, I kept it locked up at Gringotts, protected by rare magic so that nobody could take it."

Tom leant in further, hoping she would divulge the details of the security enough that he would be able to bypass it and simply swipe the cup.

"Anyway my boy," She started to get up from her seat, making a few attempts before being able to lift herself fully. "Thank you for the hot chocolate but I really must be going, Hokey and I get agitated without our morning nap. Maybe in a few days, I'll return to tell you the rest."

Sure enough, she did. A few days later, Hepzibah Smith waltzed in through the shop doors with Hokey still trailing behind her. "Any more of that hot chocolate left?" She smiled at Tom who was waiting behind the counter impatiently, as he had been since she left.

"For you, of course." He gave her his winning smile and followed her upstairs to the attic once more. As they had done previously, Hepzibah took her seat and watched on as Tom made her drink.

"Where was I last time?" She asked, beckoning Hokey to sit beside her.

"You had just mentioned how you kept the cup at home, you were given it rather mysteriously weren't you." He finished making her hot drink and brought it over to her.

"Ah yes!" She recalled the memory from just a few days ago. "Well after I kept it there for a while I began to read about a series of vaults being broken into and although I knew the cup would likely be safe, I didn't fancy risking it; now I keep it somewhere nobody can find it."

Just as Tom felt himself about to ask where that was, he found himself stopping, afraid of off-putting Miss Smith. "If you were to leave it with me here at Borgin and Burkes, I would be able to assure it's security with absolute certainty."

"That's a very large if boy." She took a sip of her hot chocolate, staring down the mug at Tom. "Now I have nothing to do with the old things. I expect they'll likely be given to whoever else is a descendant once I pass."

"Miss-" Tom began.

"Please, call me Hepzibah."

"Hepzibah, I can assure you Borgin and Burkes would be willing to pay a very large sum of money for those treasures. You could bring them in tomorrow for me to assess and I'm sure would be able to come to a more than reasonable price." He was so close he could almost taste it.

"I suppose I owe it to you to at least consider whatever offer you make when I bring them in. You have listened to me natter for far longer than most others would. Come on Hokey let's go and get them, I'll be back before you close." Hokey and Hepzibah rose from their seat, going as fast as they could down the stairs and out of the shop.

Several days ago, he had pocketed the necklace found downstairs in the glass cabinet and taken the poison, replacing it with something far weaker when he returned it. Tom stayed in the attic as he waited. Shop traffic was slow enough that being downstairs was unnecessary. He watched the hours tick by on the clock that hung firmly from the attic walls, rising every few hours to check if Hepzibah was waiting for him downstairs.

Eventually, he heard the door swing open and instantly he knew it was Hepzibah. She bounced up the staircase, with Hokey running behind her to keep up the pace. "Tom, as soon as I get another one of your marvellous hot chocolates, I'll be able to show you my treasures again, I know how much you were excited by them last time. It took me quite a while to find them so a hot drink is exactly what I need." She took her usual seat again, as Tom fell into his routine and began preparing the hot drink.

Tom took his time making the drink, getting all of the ingredients out as slowly as possible. "Why don't you start taking them out for me to assess, the drink is taking a particularly strange amount of time to perfect?" He shot her a charming smile.

"Of course dear," She turned to Hokey, who sat beside her glaring mindlessly at the walls of the attic. "Do help me out Hokey."

Hokey took her time, slowly grasping the objects from Hepzibah's bag and placing them on the table. As soon as both the cup and the trophy were on the table, Tom knew it was time to strike. He slipped a slither of poison into the hot chocolate, mixing well to hide the stench that he recalled all too well.

"Here you go Hepzibah." He handed her the mug, watching eagerly as she took her first sip. "Drink it all up, I made an extra special batch for this occasion." She eagerly took another large gulp, taking in the majority of the drink.

"Oh, Tom you do treat me well, in fa-" Before she could muster another word, the mug fell from her hand, crashing against the attic floor. Hokey stood watching, frozen, as the light drained from Hepzibah's eyes.

"Oh dear Hokey," Tom smiled deviously. "What have you done?"

When Evelyn awoke, she found herself in unfamiliar surroundings. Every inch of her body ached with a fire she never knew she possessed.

"I wouldn't move too quickly," Evelyn heard a familiar voice call out to her, "we found you in quite a state, and you've been out for almost a week"

Evelyn turned to see a quaint blonde sat in the corner of the room, "Olive Hornby..." she trailed off.

"Evelyn," Olive took her hand, "it's good to see you again."

She smiled, in her final year of Hogwarts, Evelyn had taken on Olive as almost a younger sibling after she found herself losing touch with who she once thought her closest friends.

"Where are we?" Evelyn found her surroundings almost as unfamiliar as Olive appeared to her.

"We're in a safe house, theres quite a few of us here now." Olive beckoned towards the other doors, "as the sieges move north we've had to find refuge somewhere."

"A couple of us have been following the sieges to find survivors," Evelyn turned to notice the face of another student whose path she almost wished she hadn't crossed at Hogwarts, Daniel. "We were all surprised to see you without any Ministry protection." He pushed up his glasses from the tip of his nose, "I assumed Dumbledore would have taken you in by now."

Evelyn smiled at the familiar name, despite not speaking with him since her days at Hogwarts, Evelyn had heard all about his achievements in the Daily Prophet. "Why would Dumbledore have taken me in?"

"Oh Evelyn, you knew that," Olive cleared her throat, "you knew that *he* wanted the information you had, we all assumed that better care would have been taken to protect it."

"But Dumbledore knows best." Daniel rolled his eyes.

Evelyn furrowed her brow, "do you not agree?" She sat herself up. "I thought everyone always agreed with him."

"You haven't heard the half of it when you've been sheltered by the ministry. People talk Evelyn, and its not good."

Olive interjected, "he's let too many people die. He uses them as his pawns, rather than solve his own problems."

"I never knew."

"Of course you didn't," Olive sat herself at the end of Evelyns bed, "the Ministry might dislike Dumbledore not becoming Minister, but they wouldn't slander his name just yet. "Anyway, you should get some rest, we can talk later. I think there's a lot you don't know that you probably ought to."

"It was good to see you," Daniel smiled at her before leading Olive out of the room and leaving Evelyn alone with her thoughts.

Evelyn closed her eyes, and as much as she wished to stay awake, her head hit the pillow and she lost herself in an instant slumber.

When she awoke again, the room was filled with a radiant sunlight; each trinket dotted around the room reflecting the golden glow. Her skin felt warm and her mind felt clear, she had almost forgotten all about the events that had led her to where she was.

A knock on the door startled her, sending a shiver down her spine, "good morning," Olive slid her head through a gap in the door frame "ready for some breakfast?"

The thought of breakfast made her stomach rumble loudly, causing her cheeks to flush rosy. "Absolutely," she slid out of bed, reaching for the robe she found at the bedside and wrapping it around her. "Daniel will be joining us, I hope you don't mind."

"Thats fine," Evelyn might not have liked Daniel during her days at Hogwarts, but people could change and that was something she firmly believed that people could change. She

followed Olive through a small corridor until they found themselves in a common area where Daniel was waiting.

"Evelyn," he nodded at her in acknowledgement, smiling once he saw Olive enter the room and planting a kiss on her cheek. "Have a seat, we should probably talk."

She took a seat opposite him, "what do I need to know?"

"Well, how much do you know about *him*?" Olive crossed her legs, as much as Evelyn had worked in the Ministry, she knew that it was an echochamber. Anything that they disagreed with was hidden information.

Daniel looked at Olive, "I think we should just tell her everything."

Olive took a deep breath, "we all know what happened in Hogwarts, it had to have been him that opened that Chamber, he had to have released that monster that killed Myrtle. As much as the wizarding world believed it was Hagrid, it isn't a coincidence that *he* was also at Hogwarts during that time, but *you* certainly know that."

"Yes, I think everyone at the Ministry is finally aware of that fact" Evelyn cleared her throat, "I'm surprised Dumbledore still keeps his trophy on display at Hogwarts."

"Dumbledore does a lot of surprising things," Daniel rolled his eyes.

"Anyway," Olive interjected, "since Hogwarts, he kept a low profile for a few years but he's growing stronger, more confident. He seems to be on this aimless path for power, nobody knows what he is searching for, we just know that he wants everything."

"And he's taking it by force," Evelyn put the pieces together, remembering the events from only a few nights ago.

"But nobody can figure out what he wants, and until we know that..."

Evelyn knew where she was going, "so how do we find out?"

"We thought you might know something about that," Daniel gave her a hopeful look, "maybe the Ministry mentioned something?"

She shook her head, "I wasn't working on that, that's why they chose me to safeguard Hepzibah Smith. They wanted someone uninvolved, someone that maybe would slide under the radar from him."

"And they landed with you?" Olive furrowed her brow at Evelyn, "why you?"

"Why not me?" She laughed lightly, "I was an excellent Auror, barely even known by him, I was perfect."

"Evelyn." Olive and Daniel locked eyes, "you did know him."

"Well yes, but we all did. He went to the same school as us, we all crossed paths, he was in my classes sometimes..." Evelyn trailed off.

Nobody said anything; silence engulfing them.

"Why not me?" She repeated.

"Evelyn, you were his friend. Why do you think you fell out with Lily and Sara?"

"You two were maybe even more than friends," added Olive, "everyone knew at Hogwarts."

"But clearly not at the Ministry," Daniel said, "nobody who knew that would have given you that job."

"What are you talking about?" Evelyn felt as though a fog was clouding her every thought, "I had nothing more to do with that boy than you! As for Lily and Sara, well friendships end, don't they?" She looked at Daniel, "don't they?"

"They do, but not yours," Daniel commented, "you stopped being friends because of him, because of your involvement with that boy Evelyn."

"How..." Olive fumbled her words, "how did you not know? You were there, you lived through it all."

"How does someone just forget two years of their life?" Daniel probed her, "it was your life Evelyn."

"I-I didn't forget two years," she thought back, "I remember things. I remember sitting my OWLs, I remember finding out about Myrtle."

"But do you," pressed Olive, "do you remember, or do you remember it from others?"

"I did not lose two years of my life Olive!" Evelyn stood up, "you have no idea what you are talking about! I was at Hogwarts, I remember it happening. What I don't remember is interacting with him, because it did not happen!"

"You should talk to Sara, or Lily, or someone, even Dumbledore for Merlins sake."

Evelyn was filled with rage, "do not tell me what to do or who to talk to!"

"Okay, I won't," Olive stood up, "but he can," she looked down at Daniel before storming out.

"You should listen to her Evelyn. Think about it, what would we gain from lying to you? How would the two of us have the exact same memories of you and him, memories that you don't have, memories that for Merlins sake, we could do with right about now! We want you to remember, we need to know what you know but you don't even know that you know it!"

"I can't listen to this!" Her hand found its way to her head, "I don't know what you're talking about. It didn't happen." She spat each of the words out of her mouth, like poison dripping from her tongue, "you are lying to me!"

"Think about it!" Daniel stood in front of her, taking her face in his hands, "for Merlin's sake think."

"About what?"

"Do you remember your time at Hogwarts? Really? When you imagine it, can you really see it all unfolding? Or can you just see what other people have told you? Do you remember the Slug Club, your holidays in your last years at Hogwarts, or sitting your OWL exams? Do you remember finding out about Myrtle Warren?" He pressed her further, "do you actually remember any of this? Any of it at all? No you don't, because it's all gone. It happened but it's gone, and we need you to find it. Evelyn," he spoke softly now, "we need you to remember, we really do."

"But- what if I can't?"

Evelyn knew she had to remember. If not for her, then for the Wizarding World. She had to know what truly happened during her time at Hogwarts and she knew just the people to speak to.

"So you'll head up on the Hogwarts Express to see Dumbledore," Daniel said to her, "then you can go to Inverness, that's where we last knew Lily was."

"And we haven't heard from Sara in a while now..." added Olive.

Evelyn felt a pit in her heart but she knew Sara was strong, she would be fine. "We should get going if I want to make it on time, thank you for having me." She smiled at Olive and Daniel, grateful for their hospitality.

"I hope you remember Evelyn."

"Me too," but she wasn't sure she wanted to. Everything that they had told her seemed unreal, it wasn't her, but somehow, it had been.

Daniel had offered to drive her the night before so she bundled herself into the front seat of his car with an uncomfortable smile. The pair sat in silence for the duration of the journey, neither quite knowing what to say. Nothing either could say would nullify the tension they were feeling.

Daniel walked her to the station without a word, "thank you." Evelyn smiled meekly.

"Best of luck," he looked her in the eyes, "we really need this." His gaze intensified, "you have to remember."

"I'll try," it was all she could do, and Daniel reminding her was only of so much help.

Once Daniel had left, Evelyn felt the panic rise inside of her. Anxiously, she clutched at the ticket, pressing it close to her chest as she breathed in the familiar air of Birmingham Station, a place she remembered vaguely from her days at Hogwarts. She made her way towards the barrier almost instinctively, as though her body was recalling this exact moment only a few years ago. Evelyn closed her eyes and with a brisk run, she ran straight through the barrier and onto Platform 9 3/4.

Everywhere she looked there were students, rushing around the platform without an ounce of regard for personal space. It was the sort of situation that would usually have made her uncomfortable, but the prospect of going back to Hogwarts made her feel unusually calm, answers were waiting for her. Steam from the scarlet engine of the Hogwarts Express flooded the platform, casting a haze over the platform and causing the students to all fade away from Evelyn and lose themselves in the smoke. Like ghosts, they manoeuvred through the mist and onto the Hogwarts Express, Evelyn following closely behind a gaggle of students and making her way into an empty carriage.

Once Evelyn was inside the carriage, the tiredness overcame her. Every inch of her body craved sleep and she was happy to oblige. Evelyn slept as though she hadn't in weeks, she slept as though Tom Riddle didn't exist, as though he was simply a creature of her nightmares.

As the train rolled up, Evelyn saw the familiar sight that was Hogwarts: standing tall in all of its beauty. Hogwarts had remained the same after all these years, ready to welcome her back with open arms.

As soon as Evelyn stepped off the train, she felt at ease. Hogwarts was her home and had been ever since she first stepped inside all those years ago. Her body ran on autopilot as she began to make her way towards the thestral drawn carriages waiting outside the station. She hadn't been back in years, but she felt mysteriously calm, her body remembered Hogwarts, as much as perhaps her mind did not.

"Are yeh the last one 'ere?" Evelyn squinted as she heard the voice, attempting to sharpen her eyesight enough to see more than simply a large figure stood at the end of the train platform.

"I think so," she shouted down the platform to him, her response causing him to jog briskly until he was level with her.

"Rubeus Hagrid." He extended his arm, his hand clasping over almost the entirety of Evelyn's forearm as he shook it.

"Evelyn Rivers."

A few moments of silence passed over the pair as they both clambered into a carriage, that until her sixth year at Hogwarts, Evelyn had believed to be charmed rather than pulled by

thestrals. Evelyn sat opposite him, her eyes wandering across his face in an attempt to decipher where she knew him from.

"Are yeh here for the teachin' job?" He brushed a collection of wiry hairs behind his ears as he spoke.

"No, I'm just here to see Professor Dumbledore, I'm an old student of his." Evelyn smiled at Hagrid, she hadn't wanted to be alone, especially not before seeing Dumbledore, an event she knew would be important. She looked at him up and down, Evelyn remembered the boy, whether it be from her own memories, or what others had told her, she remembered him. "I remember you, you're the boy that got expelled."

"It weren't my fault. I never did what they said. I weren't doing anything wrong and then suddenly I was out. Said my Aragog was dangerous but he weren't, he's the sweetest beast I ever kept."

"What have you done since being expelled?" Evelyn wasn't sure if she really wanted to know, she just needed something to fill the silence.

"Well, I been 'ere, haven't I? Dumbledore's been training me to be a gamekeeper, a mighty good one at that. Ain't nowhere else I'd rather be you know? Hogwarts is where the magic is." He wasn't wrong. Although there was magic everywhere, the magic surrounding Hogwarts was different, it was special. Hogwarts held a special place in many magical folks hearts. "What have you been doin' since you left? Still runnin' around with that Riddle b-" abruptly his cheeks began to flush a violent red, "I shouldn't have said that. I should not have said that."

So maybe it was true, maybe what Olive and Daniel had told her was reality. Somehow, this boy remembered what she couldn't.

"I expect Dumbledore will be waitin' for yeh. Anyways I got places to be..." He spoke with such speed, barely enunciating each word let alone the syllables that made it up. He gave Evelyn one last smile before jumping out of the carriage and making his way into the castle.

Evelyn wasn't sure how to respond. She wasn't sure what she had just heard, or what she was about to hear and it didn't bode well with her. The unknown had always made Evelyn anxious but as she made her way towards Hogwarts, it gave her more anxiety than ever before.

Usually, stepping into the place she called home would have been enough to calm her nerves, but today it made them worse. Evelyn didn't know what she would find out, she didn't know if she could even trust what Dumbledore would say to her.

Evelyn's body ran on autopilot as soon as she entered through the castle doors, her legs taking her towards Dumbledore's office without a second thought. As she strolled through the familiar corridors, she felt her heart begin to sink in her chest, further and further with each step. Hogwarts may have been her home all those years ago, but it certainly didn't feel like it today.

Despite knowing she was safe, Evelyn found her hands running up her legs, edging closer to the wand protruding from her pocket. Her fingers coiled around it, clutching it as though she were a snake strangling her prey: she needed her wand. She may have felt safe now, but who knew what could happen. Evelyn couldn't predict the future, as much as she wished she could, so she had to be ready for any changes that could happen around her.

When Evelyn arrived at Dumbledore's old office, it was empty: the door was open but there was nobody inside. She knew it would be strange to go inside without permission, but Evelyn needed to be inside, she needed the safety of the familiar location to help ease her nerves.

As soon as she stepped inside his office she felt her heart rate begin slow, her grip on her wand beginning to loosen with each step she took: everything was as she remembered it. Gryffindor red accents were splattered across the room, an almost empty bowl of liquorice laces sat on his desk; Evelyn was glad to be here. Everything felt right, it felt familiar, safe.

Evelyn took a seat on the chair opposite Dumbledore's desk, closing her eyes. "I hope I'm not disturbing you, Evelyn." Once she opened her eyes, she saw Professor Dumbledore sat opposite her, his hands fumbling inside the bowl of liquorice laces. "Would you like one? I often find that something sweet helps me to think."

"No thank you Professor."

"To what do I owe the pleasure if not for my confectionary? He popped a liquorice lace into his mouth.

"I-" she took a deep breath, "I need to know about Tom Riddle."

"Interesting..."Dumbledore pondered, "why now?"

Evelyn blinked rapidly, "you aren't even questioning why I want to know?" It was all real.

"No," he stated simply, "I knew you would eventually." He took another liquorice lace.

"Tell me about him, tell me about what happened."

"I fear you may not trust words Evelyn, I would rather show you Evelyn. Words may not be able to convey the truth that you are searching for," he stood up, motioning towards a small stone basin, "I think you ought to see what everyone else saw,I extracted these memories from myself a few years ago." He motioned for Evelyn to stand up, "take a look."

Evelyn stood up, making her way into the basin and plunging her face inside.

Immediately, she found herself transported back into Professor Dumbledores Office, as if she had never entered the basin. She watched as younger self emerged from the basin, "hello?" It was as if she was invisible, hidden from herself.

*Professor Dumbledore walked to a muted red armchair, tucking into a liquorice lace. "Evelyn that was the boys future. That was what he will become without intervention."*

*"Well, why haven't you done something yet then? If this really is the future, why haven't you reported it?" She watched as her younger self almost shouted, brows furrowed, "why have you shown me such a thing?"*

*"A memory gained through unlawful timetravel is not exactly the evidence that the Ministry of Magic would want. I cannot do anything to stop this, I cannot change the course of my own destiny, but you can. Your future is not set in stone and his doesn't have to be either, although this event will occur in the future, it could occur anywhere in the future, it could occur differently from how it did before, and that could be down to your actions."*

*Her eyes widened, "mine? Professor I do not understand, what are you asking of me?"*

*"I wish for you to do whatever Tom Riddle asks of you in the future, but I wish for you to have this memory in your mind. I wish for you to continue to befriend him, show him empathy, show him the emotions that make you human, I wish for you to help him. You cannot stop him, you can only delay, or alter his future, and I believe that this is a job that only you can achieve."*

*"I-I" She stuttered, "I-I don't think I can..."*

And all at once, the world faded from around her and she found herself somewhere else entirely, she found herself in the vast Hogwarts corridors.

*"Professor Dumbledore," she found herself approach him in the corridor.*

*"Yes?" He turned to face her, stopping in his tracks.*

*"I was just wondering if I could have a word with you, you see there have been some," she paused, "complications."*

*"Come to my office, we can discuss all we like there," he said, leading the way along the endless corridors, a both versions of Evelyn following closely behind him.*

*"I do believe it's been a while since we last spoke Evelyn," he took a seat in the Gryffindor red armchair that Evelyn recalled well.*

*"Yes Professor," she took a seat in the chair and sat up, looking him in the eyes, "It's just that I am not sure what to do with myself. You and I both know that the boy is innocent but he is going to go to Azkaban for a crime that he did not commit, it is simply unfair!" She felt tears prickle in her eyes and she hastily wiped them away.*

*"Unfortunately, there is not much that can be done. It is everybody's word against mine however I will see what I can do to help him." Dumbledore said with honesty.*

*"Professor I must admit I am unsure of what I am doing, I do not know if I wish to do this anymore."*

*"Evelyn, you must persevere with your task. The boy must be stopped, he must be helped, and he must be changed. I firmly believe you are the only one who can do this," he spoke sincerely.*

*"But why me, why not somebody else?" Evelyn said with a quivering voice.*

*"It just must be you, you must believe it can be you. It is important to fight and fight again, and keep fighting, for only then can evil be kept at bay, though never quite eradicated."*

And the picture faded away once more. As Evelyn pulled her face out of the basin, she felt herself losing her breath, "Professor? Was that all real?"

An older looking Professor Dumbledore responded, "it was entirely real."

"So, so I worked with him? You made me help him? You urged me to carry on, you-"

He cut her off, "Evelyn, I merely showed you what he would become and suggested something that you were willing to do. You chose to befriend him first, you involved yourself with the boy of your own free will."

Evelyn was stunned, her mouth falling open. "Professor-"

"You are not my student anymore, Albus will suffice." He said formally.

"Professor," she reiterated, "I was a child!"

"As was I when I made decisions that changed the course of my life."

Evelyn paused, "what else happened?"

"Evelyn," he took a breath, "you spent two years chasing after that boy, I only know as much as you told me, and I wish I knew more, but I don't."

"But I need to remember. I need to be useful. I don't know what I'm supposed to know, all I know is that it's important I remember."

"Perhaps you ought to try and trigger your memories Evelyn, I find a walk around the Hogwarts grounds to be rather soothing. Sometimes, I find the ghosts hold great knowledge." Dumbledore stood up, "I know you plan on visiting Inverness, and before you do, I would like to invite you back to remain in the castle, I would like you to teach Charms alongside one of our newer Professors. I think you will feel much safer here."

"I don't know what to say," Evelyn had always wanted to teach at Hogwarts, but here and now, in the middle of a war, it no longer appeared right for her.

"No need to say anything just yet."

And so she didn't. Instead, she made her way out of his office and began to aimlessly wander around the castle. She didn't know where she was heading, but her body moved on instinct, taking her to the place it knew best, the Ravenclaw Common Room.

Evelyn smiled when she saw the familiar portrait of Rowena Ravenclaw, smiling at her, "you can see me in water, but I never get wet. What am I?"

"A reflection," the answer came to her with ease, her Ravenclaw mind clearly unscathed since her days at Hogwarts. Evelyn found herself wondering aimlessly through the castle but it brought nothing back. Everything felt familiar, but it brought back nothing specific, nothing she didn't already know.

"Hello Evelyn, I haven't seen you around in years." She heard a soft voice call out behind her, turning to spot the ghost of Helena Ravenclaw stood a few feet away.

"Lovely to see you Rowena," Evelyn recalled frequently speaking with Helena, as did many Ravenclaw students; it had become almost a part of being a Hogwarts student. "I've been meaning to ask you actually," she thought back to what Dumbledore had told her, "did I ever speak to you about a boy?"

"Why yes!" Helena's interest was piqued at the memory of their conversations, "we spoke about if you could trust this boy!"

"Did I-" she stuttered, "did I mention Tom Riddle at all?"

Rowena shuddered, in the years since their last conversation, Rowena had grown ashamed of her interactions with the boy. "Why, what has he told you?" She became defensive.

"No, nothing," Evelyn was taken aback, "I was just curious..." she trailed off, "did I ever mention him?"

"Not by name, but I recall the Bloody Baron telling me his name to forward to you." Rowena still seemed unsettled, her ghostly demeanour appearing more grey than white.

"Rowena," Evelyn tilted her head at the Grey Lady, "are you okay?"

"I remember the boy," her lips trembled, "I wish I didn't but I do. I fear I made a mistake."

Evelyn pressed her, "what mistake?"

"I told him a story, a story I should not have..." she quivered.

"A story about what?" But when Evelyn heard no answer, she found herself somehow able to answer it herself, "was it about Albania?" Something about the place felt familiar, the word forming itself in her mouth.

"I've said too much." Helena vanished into thin air, vanishing without a trace.

But a trace that remained was a faint image of a forest, deep within secluded Albanian woods.

Evelyn made her journey up to Inverness feeling lost. Her trip to Hogwarts had provided nothing, no new memories, barely even an inkling of what she needed to remember. She could only hope that whatever Lily had to tell her would prove more useful.

"Evelyn," she turned to spot Lily behind her, greeting each other with a warm embrace, "it's been so long." Lily smiled, her smile barely visible from all the smoke filling up the station. "How was your journey?" She asked politely.

"It was good, I was just at Hogwarts, I met with Professor Dumbledore," Hogwarts was the only thing she could remember they had in common, it seemed the only safe middle ground.

"How was that?" Lily ushered her out of the station, "I'm just a short walk away..." she added, leading the way down a set of cobbled streets.

"It hasn't changed a bit," as much as the memories were missing, Evelyn still remembered the surroundings. "it was... eye-opening."

"I thought as much." Lily nodded at her, Evelyn getting the impression that it might be quite obvious why she was all the way up in Inverness.

"Yeah..." she mumbled in response, the pair not uttering another word until they arrived at Lilys house.

"Come on in," she beckoned Evelyn into the house.

Evelyn followed close behind her, walking into the room and taking a seat beside her on a petite sofa, barely visible under the dim lighting.

"So..." the two exchanged a look like no other.

"How have you been?" Evelyn asked politely, "what did you turn to once you left Hogwarts?"

"Well, I first travelled for a short period," she began, "I wanted to pursue Quidditch but instead I commentate and report on the games! I mostly work for The Montrose Magpies; it's a dream come true!"

Evelyn smiled, Lily was truly beaming with happiness, she seemed to have finally came into herself. "That's lovely to hear."

"Anyway," Lily changed her tone, "I knew when you called you didn't just want a catch up, what did you need Evelyn?" There was a bitter feeling in the air, a feeling that Evelyn couldn't quite shake.

Evelyn took a moment, "I need to know about him." She knew she wouldn't need to say more, Lily knew exactly what she was talking about.

"What exactly?"

"I need to know everything about me and him, anything we did together, anything he told me that I shared, I just..." she paused, "I need to know anything important."

"I don't know how helpful I can be Evelyn," she raised her brow, "you didn't tell us much about you and him."

"Please," Evelyn pleaded, "please try." She needed to know, it was important, and not only to her.

"You started talking to him at the beginning of Fifth Year, Slughorn did those Slug Club meetings and you were both invited. I don't know what you spoke about but I know that's when it all started. You started to change. Then, there was the Christmas party and..." she stumbled, "he bought you a dress."

"He bought me a dress?" Evelyn said with disbelief, "I-I why would he do that?"

"You never told us Evelyn, but he bought you a dress and you went to that party with him. Both Sara and I thought something happened that night, when you came back to the dorms, you didn't seem yourself. Then you went home for Christmas and we didn't speak much, but when you came back, we found out what he had told you. You thought someone had lied about how your parents died."

Evelyn gasped audibly, her parents death had been something she had finally overcome, that chapter in her life had been sealed shut for years and it felt as though someone was picking at the scab. "And-and did they?"

Lily frowned, "we never found out. You became cold with us straight after you had told us, then you were in the Hospital Wing and we were so worried," she took a breath, "then there was the incident with Myrtle and you just kind of vanished."

"Vanished?"

"Yes," Lily continued, "you didn't talk to any of us over summer. Nobody heard from you until Sixth year. You were sneaking in and out of the common room, then you went away at Christmas-"

"Albania," Evelyn cut her off.

"And we just sort of stopped talking after that."

"So what happened in Albania?" Evelyn had this image in her head, she remembered something, she knew that she had gone to Albania...something had to have happened there. She flicked some kind of switch.

"You never said, but something happened, something changed. You were already distant, but whatever happened there, whatever he did, it stuck."

"How am I supposed to remember that?" Evelyn felt her eyes beginning to fill with tears, she had to remember this. She had spent all that time with the boy, surely she knew something, something that could take him down.

"I'm not sure Evelyn," Lily sounded sympathetic, "I'm really not sure."

"I want to remember, I really do. I need to know. I need to stop him."

Lily interjected, "and you will eventually. You need to be patient, you were a child."

And she was, she was a shell of a child, an empty russian doll that everybody hoped contained more, but what if she simply didn't?

"Maybe go back to Hogwarts, take Dumbledore up on that offer."

"You know?" She wiped the tears before they could fall.

Lily smiled, "I knew as soon as you arrived at Olives', I've been in the loop for a long time now Evelyn. Dumbledore wants to protect you, and I think you should let him. Hogwarts is where it all happened, maybe it can be where you remember it all."

"I have to go back, don't I?"

"I can't tell you that you have to, but I think it's what you need." Lily almost whispered now, "I think Hogwarts is the safest place for you right now."

Evelyn paused, "I think so too." As much as Hogwarts was an almost blank picture in her mind, the familiarity was comforting, it was the only place she knew, the only place left that she could go.

Dumbledore was unsurprised when he saw Tom Riddle walk into his office ten years later: he had been expecting Tom would return to Hogwarts sooner or later. "Good evening, Tom," said Dumbledore easily. "Won't you sit down?"

"Thank you" He began taking the seat to which Dumbledore had gestured. "I heard that you became headmaster." His voice was colder than Dumbledore could remember from his time at Hogwarts, his features seemed almost distorted from all the darkness running through his veins. Dumbledore could sense the change. "A worthy choice I believe."

"I'm glad you approve." Dumbledore smiled at him, taking a liquorice lace. "May I offer you a liquorice lace or a drink?"

"A drink would be welcome. I have come a long way to see you"

Dumbledore waltzed over to the tall cabinet he had kept in his office ever since earning the title of Headmaster. He poured himself, and Tom, a goblet of wine before returning to his desk. "So Tom." He paused. "To what do I owe the pleasure?"

"They don't call me 'Tom' anymore. These days, I am known as—"

Dumbledore quickly cut him off. "I know what you are known as, but to me, I'm afraid you will always be Tom Riddle." He smiled pleasantly at Tom. "I guess that is one of the irritating things about teachers. I am afraid they never quite forget their charges' youthful beginning." He raised his glass, as though toasting to Tom.

"I am surprised you have remained here so long," Tom said after a short pause. "I always wondered why a wizard such as yourself would never wish to leave school."

"Well, to a wizard such as myself, there can be nothing more important than passing on ancient skills, helping hone young minds. If I remember, you once saw the attraction of teaching too."

"I see it still." Said Tom. "I merely wondered why you—who are so often asked for advice by the Ministry, and who have twice, I think, been offered the post of Minister —"

"Three times at the last count, actually." Dumbledore smiled. "But the Ministry never attracted me as a career. Again, something we have in common, I think."

Tom inclined his head, taking another sip of his wine as he soaked in the silence. "I have returned," he said, after a little while, "later, perhaps, than Professor Dippet expected. But I have returned, nevertheless, to request again what he once told me I was too young to have. I have come to you to ask that you permit me to return to this castle, to teach. I think you must

know that I have seen and done much since I left this place. I could show and tell your students things they can gain from no other wizard."

"Yes, I certainly do know that you have seen and done much since leaving us," he said quietly. "Rumors of your doings have reached your old school, Tom. I should be sorry to believe half of them."

"Greatness inspires envy, envy engenders spite, spite spawns lies. You must know this, Dumbledore."

"You call it greatness what you have been doing, do you?" Dumbledore could feel himself begin to tiptoe in the conversation rather than stride.

"Certainly." As he spoke, his eyes began to turn red. "I have experimented; I have pushed the boundaries of magic further, perhaps, than they have ever been pushed —"

"Of some kinds of magic," Dumbledore corrected him, placing his goblet down on the desk. "Of some. Of others, you remain, forgive me, woefully ignorant."

At this, Tom almost smiled. Rather than a look of happiness associated with a smile, what Dumbledore saw was a taut leer, verging on the edge of rage.

"The old argument," Tom spoke softly. "But nothing I have seen in the world has supported your famous pronouncements that love is more powerful than my kind of magic, Dumbledore."

"Perhaps you have been looking in the wrong places," suggested Dumbledore.

"Well, then, what better place to start my fresh researches than here, at Hogwarts?" said Voldemort. "Will you let me return? Will you let me share my knowledge with your students? I place myself and my talents at your disposal. I am yours to command."

Dumbledore raised his eyebrows. "And what will become of those whom you command? What will happen to those who call themselves — or so rumour has it — the Death Eaters?"

"My friends," He began, for want of a better word. "Will carry on without me, I am sure."

"I am glad to hear that you consider them friends," said Dumbledore. "I was under the impression that they are more in the order of servants."

"You are mistaken," stated Tom.

"Then if I were to go to the Hog's Head tonight, I would not find a group of them — Nott, Rosier, Mulciber, Dolohov — awaiting your return? Devoted friends indeed, to travel this far with you on a snowy night, merely to wish you luck as you attempted to secure a teaching post."

"You are omniscient as ever, Dumbledore."

"Oh no, merely friendly with the local barmen," said Dumbledore lightly. "Now, Tom . . ." He drew himself up in the seat. "Let us speak openly. Why have you come here tonight, surrounded by henchmen, to request a job we both know you do not want?"

"A job I do not want? On the contrary, Dumbledore, I want it very much." He looked coldly surprised, an emotion Dumbledore had previously not seen him express.

"Oh, you want to come back to Hogwarts, but you do not want to teach any more than you wanted to when you were eighteen. What is it you're after, Tom? Why not try an open request for once?"

Tom sneered. "If you do not want to give me a job —"

"Of course I don't," Dumbledore cut him off. "And I don't think for a moment you expected me to. Nevertheless, you came here, you asked, you must have had a purpose."

Tom stood up. As he stood Dumbledore could see how little he truly looked like himself, he looked less like himself than ever before. "This is your final word?"

"It is." Dumbledore stood himself up as well, matching Tom's positioning.

"Then we have nothing more to say to each other."

"No, nothing," said Dumbledore, and a great sadness filled his face. "The time is long gone when I could frighten you with a burning wardrobe and force you to make repayment for your crimes. But I wish I could, Tom. . . . I wish I could. . . ."

And with that, Tom walked away.

Tom left the office briskly, he had business to attend to, he couldn't have Dumbledore holding him up any longer. As soon as he was out of the office, his body took him where he needed to go without him even having to think. It didn't take him long before he found himself on the seventh floor, opposite the all too familiar tapestry. He paced in front of the wall three times, eventually revealing the Room of Requirement.

Whilst at Hogwarts, Tom had used the Room of Requirement for all sorts. He had used it as his safe haven, his place to call home. Every free moment he had was either spent there or in the library researching one of his extracurricular activities. Now, he was in the place he had always dreamed of, he had the power he had craved all those years ago and he felt truly indestructible.

As he walked deeper into the Room of Requirement, unwanted memories of his time at Hogwarts began to bombard him. Every book meant something to him, every inch of this room was filled with memories from his life. He had grown up in this room, he had experienced firsts and lasts within these four walls. Hogwarts was more of his home than anywhere else, even Malfoy Manor.

Tom reached his hands into the bag he had been clutching to his chest for the past few hours and pulled out the item he had gone to such lengths to collect: Rowena Ravenclaws Diadem. He slipped out the blue velvet case, placing it on a chest of drawers in front of him. His hands toyed with the metal clasp, eventually sliding it open to reveal the Diadem in all its glory.

He could almost feel the corners of his lips turn upwards as it was revealed. Part of his soul resided in the diadem, it was the key to his immortality. Every Horcrux he made was a stepping stone to the immortality he had been craving for years and the Diadem was no different.

Hesitantly, he shut the box again, concealing the Diadem. As he looked around the room, he knew he had chosen the perfect place to hide it. Nobody would ever find the concealed part of his soul: he believed he would truly live forever.

Mountains upon mountains of furniture were stacked all across the room, table legs sticking out from all angles. The room looked like a disaster zone, it appeared as though a hurricane had struck straight through the room. At first glance, it appeared as though every item was

destroyed but upon closer inspection, Tom could see a muggle chessboard stood untouched in the corner of the room.

Tom knew he had to hurry up, if he didn't leave soon he knew Dumbledore would know: Dumbledore knew everything. He scoured the room, searching every corner for the perfect location to hide the Diadem but his attempts were futile. Nowhere matched the standard he was looking for but he knew it never would. He knew the room's defences were enough to keep it safe, but he still desired an extra level of safety. He needed a net that he could fall back on.

Immediately, his eyes locked on to a crevice deep within the room. It was surrounded by various Hogwarts textbooks, laying in a disorganised manner around it; he had found the place. Tom was quick in dropping the Diadem, he slid it into the crevice with ease and turned instantly, ready to leave.

As he began to make his way towards the door, a quiet quiver caught his attention. A simper came from close to the exit and he knew at once.

"T-T-Tom?"

His lips curled upwards, "I should hope you didn't see anything." And he took her arm, twisting them away into the darkness together.

**[most of the dialogue for this chapter is NOT mine, it is taken from the HBP book]**

Evelyn felt his firm grip on her arm, but she couldn't pull away, she felt some sort of magnetic connection, pulling her closer. She wanted to speak, but she couldn't, instead Tom dropped her hand and made the first move.

"Evelyn, you look in far better shape than when I saw you last," he raised his arms and all the doors closed in an instant, "just a precaution you see."

But Evelyn couldn't even move, she couldn't get her lips to move, let alone her limbs.

"It's wonderful to see you again," he took a step closer to her but as much as she wanted to pull away, she couldn't, it was as though an invisible string was holding her close to him. "I

had been wanting to speak with you, you see, it truly hurts me how we left off when we last interacted, and I would like to extend my sincerest apologies."

"You can't feel hurt," she felt the words tumble from her lips without a second thought.

"Very true," he nodded, "but I have found that a mention of that feeling makes for an irresistible apology."

"Even when you do not mean it?" Tom Riddle didn't say sorry, it wasn't him.

His lips curled, "even when I do not mean it."

"Well carry on then," she pressed him, "you have a lot more apologising to do."

"I have no more I wish to apologise for."

She huffed, "so that's it? Is that why you kidnapped me, to apologise?"

"Oh of course not," he took another step closer, "we have a lot more to do together than just apologise."

"And what would that entail?"

"I thought you might like us to revisit our time together," again he moved closer, "I have heard that you seek knowledge, knowledge that I possess."

Her eyes rolled, an odd sense of calmness overcoming her, "I want nothing you have," she looked him up and down, "I would like what's mine, but I can go without if you are the one to provide it." As much as she craved her memory back, she craved safety from Tom more, the only true memory she had of him was of him using an Unforgiveable on her. He had looked her in the eye and done the one thing she thought no one would ever do.

"What's yours? You mean ours; I think. Those memories were ours, we shared them, and why do you seem too eager to be rid of me?"

"Isn't it obvious Tom?" His name somehow felt normal on her lips once more, but he grimaced upon hearing it. "Tom? Is that not your name?"

"It was a long time ago. I am no longer referred to by that muggle name," he spat, "my followers call me by the name I fashioned, the name I deserve, I am Lord Voldemort."

Evelyn didn't say a word. She had heard of his new name, but only in whispers. It was unknown information to the Ministry, and therefore unknown to her. "Well, isn't it obvious why I wish to be rid of you?" She avoided his name, old or new, "you are a monster. Have you not seen what you've become?"

"Oh Evelyn," he almost laughed, "I am no monster. I have taken what was mine, I have claimed the power that others have desired, but never had the strength to claim for themselves. I have done what thousands of men failed to do before me, I should be worshipped by all, not just few. A monster would not be followed in the way that I am, a monster would not hold such power over all, a monster would not do what I do. I am no monster; I am so much more."

Evelyn recalled seeing his followers on those many nights ago, they were cloaked, hidden from all. "If you have such power, then why do you have such fear? You have it all do you not?"

"I have no fear, Evelyn." He said harshly.

"You hide," she gestured to his cloaked figure, "you hide yourself. You lead this great army, but you hide yourself and you hide them. What about this power are you trying to hide?"

"You think I am hiding?" He was now so close to her she could feel his warm breath on her face, "I do not hide." With that, he lifted his arms and pulled the cloak from his head.

Evelyn froze. He was nothing like what she had heard. His once pristine face was tortured, scars tracing around his pale face, distorting his features.

"This," he stepped closer, "this is what power looks like. And you do right to fear it."

Evelyn wished to say she didn't fear it, but she did. There was something about him stood there before her that formed a lump in her throat. He looked incomplete, as though he wore a mask of his own face, as mask that didn't quite match up. His features looked blurred, as though they were covered in hot wax.

"You-" she swallowed hesitantly, "you..."

"You don't have to say anything, in fact, I would prefer if you didn't." He put the cloak back on, leaving just his lips exposed. "Now, might I show you to your room?"

Evelyn shook her head, "my room? I am not staying with you."

"Really? You have nowhere else to go, I'm sure you'll find my manor quite comfortable." He tilted his head at her, "I have a whole room set up for you."

"I am not stay here." She reached her hand into her pocket, but it was empty.

"You do not need your wand." He informed her, "you won't be doing any spells whilst you are here Evelyn."

"So what will I be doing then?" She crossed her arms.

"That is something you will be informed of another time. For now, I have business to attend to," he raised his arms, opening the door in an instant, "Regulus, show the girl her room."

"The girl?" She laughed lightly, but Tom was already gone, replaced instead by a tall curly haired boy who bowed gracefully upon entering the room.

"My Lord," he dared not look him in the eyes, instead bowing down at his feet before making his way towards Evelyn. "Do follow me," he instructed her.

Evelyn looked the boy up and down, "what if I do not want to?"

"The Dark Lord has allowed me to do whatever I must for you to obey." He gave her a stern look.

Evelyn grimaced, "oh he has allowed you, has he?"

Regulus simply nodded, sliding his wand down into his hand, "I would rather not force you to comply."

She sighed, "then lead the way."

He led her out of the hallway, towards a sparkling, marble staircase, "upstairs," he stated.

Every step she took, her shoes rattled against the marble, her heart falling as she delved deeper into the Manor. As much as they had felt unnervingly calm around Tom, it began to dawn on her how trapped she truly was. Dumbledore had likely not been expecting her back, Lily had watched as she left, Daniel and Olive wouldn't be waiting for her. Nobody would know where she was, even she was unsure of her own whereabouts. But now, she was stuck. For some reason, she was here, following some strange boy in the same way he was following another.

"This is you," she snapped back to reality, staring into a quaint room at the top of the Manor. "Step inside."

Evelyn took a hesitant step into the room with an awkward smile. The small room was just tidy enough to show it had been cleaned for her, but with just enough life to show someone had once lived here. A small armchair sat in the corner; books bundled on top of it. "Am I not too old for The Toadstool Tales?" She fumbled the book in her hands, showing it to Regulus.

"The Dark Lord thought you would enjoy the distraction."

She rolled her eyes, "the Dark Lord thought wrong."

"Trust me," he took a step closer to her, gripping her arm, "you will need the distraction. It will get lonely being alone," and with that, he shut the door, locking her in without another word.

When she awoke the next morning, the first thing she heard was her name.

"Evelyn."

She shot awake in a flurry.

"Evelyn."

"H-hello?" She called out, sitting up in her bed.

"I'm coming in," the voice called out, whispering enchantments under his breath before swinging open the door.

She blinked rapidly, rubbing her eyes to reveal the blurred figure of the man she met last night, "to what do I owe the pleasure this morning Regulus?"

"The Dark Lord had requested your presence," Regulus looked her up and down, "now."

Evelyn rolled her eyes, "well..." She slid out of her bed, wrapping a robe around her cold body with a shiver, "if the Dark Lord insists."

Regulus' face remained blank as they journeyed across the Manor, silence falling between them until the pair arrived outside a large door. Regulus knocked lightly, immediately dropping into a bowing position before the door even swung open. "My Lord, I have the girl."

Without another word, the door opened, revealing a large circular office, the walls lined with tall bookcases, each filled with more books than Evelyn could even imagine.. In the middle of the room was a black desk where Tom sat with a smirk, "go now Regulus." His eyes remained on Evelyn, not even flickering to acknowledge the boy, "come on in, sit." He commanded her, gesturing to the dark grey seat opposite him.

"I'll stand," she turned to him, closing the door behind her as she traipsed into the office.

"Sit." Evelyn felt his eyes piercing hers as he lifted his arms, moving out the chair closer to her, "sit." And so she did. "Now, we have much to discuss," he crossed his arms at her.

"Oh," she mimicked him, "we do, do we?"

"Do not talk back to me," he snapped at her, "you are not here as a guest need I remind you."

"Well why am I here then?" She crossed her arms at him, "what does the Dark Lord wish for me?"

"I require your humanity." He looked at her simply, tilting his head.

Evelyn blinked. The Dark Lord, the one feared by all across the Wizarding World did not want to torture her again, he did not want her dead, he simply wanted a part of her he did not have of his own.

"You- you want my humanity?"

"And your loyalty."

Evelyn locked her eyes onto his, "you want me to be loyal to you? To the man who tortured me, to the man who is murdering muggleborns, who murdered Hepzibah Smith, who released the Basilisk from the Chamber of Secrets. You think I will bow to you, then you are wrong."

"I do not think, I know. Everyone has a price Evelyn, even you," he stood up, sliding off the desk and taking a step closer to her, "everyone would do things that they had never dreamed of for the right price. You are no different," he placed his hand on her chin, tilting her head up to face him, "you will bow to me." He dropped her chin, turning to face the door which swung open in an instant, "you will bow to me, for her."

Evelyn turned to face the door and there stood a face she had not seen since her days at Hogwarts. "Sara," she let out a raggedy breath, "oh Sara." She looked like a shell of a human, her eyes were blank

"Your little friend Sara is currently under the Imperius Curse." He beckoned Sara closer, "anything I ask you to do, you will do, not for me, but for her." Sara walked closer to the pair of them, staring glumly at Evelyn. "Should you fail to do anything I ask, you will not suffer, but she will. She will do so, not at my hand, but at yours."

He nodded at Sara, causing her to leave the room to Evelyn's dismay. "Sara," she cried out weakly as she left.

"Do I make myself clear?"

Evelyn's heart ached, she may not have seen Sara in years, but they had been closer than almost any other. She had longed to see Sara ever since she managed to reconnect with Lily. "Yes."

"You see, your humanity is already proving useful for me," he sat back down on the desk, "now, I require something of you. You might not recall but many years ago, during our time together at Hogwarts, you attempted to develop the skill of Legilimency, something I know you managed to perfect as an Auror. I require you to use it on somebody," he took a breath, "on Regulus Black."

"On Regulus?" Evelyn pictured the young boy who had led her through the Manor, "why him? Why me?"

"You see," he began, "Legilimency works best when one is at ease, when one does not have the strength to protect their mind, when one does not fear. Regulus does not fear you, make him trust you, in any way you desire."

"And what do you want me to find out?"

"I need you to read him, I need his secrets." He stood up, taking a step towards Evelyn, "I need you to penetrate his mind, extract his thoughts, and report them to me. Should you fail..." he trailed off, gesturing to the door, "well, you know what happens."

"Yes," she swallowed the lump in her throat. Evelyn was not afraid for herself, she knew what he could do to her but she was ready, he had done far worse to many and in a way, she was lucky.

"Regulus," he called out, swinging open the doors with just his hands, "take Evelyn to the library, let her pick what she wants, she'll be staying in her room for a while now. I expect you to keep guard, be at her door until I say otherwise. Is that clear?"

Regulus bowed, "yes my Lord. I will not let you down."

"Go." He said nothing else, instead turning to the bookshelves lining the walls and selecting one, "now."

Regulus turned, causing Evelyn to jump up out of her seat and trail after him. "So," she sighed into the silence, "you have a library?"

"The Manor has one, filled with books at the Dark Lords request." Regulus spoke monotonously.

"I'm not sure that he and I have similar tastes in books," she waltzed into the library, fingering the spines. She picked one out, "*Secrets of the Darkest Art* isn't what I would usually choose." She placed it back, exchanging it for another, "nor *Moste Potente Potions*."

"What do you want then?" He huffed, "did you want more Babbity Rabbity?"

She rolled her eyes, "no, I don't," she turned away from the bookshelves, "do you have anything else? Anything at all?"

He sighed, "I might have some more."

Evelyn tilted her head at him, "well..."

"I wouldn't do this for just anyone, but since the Dark Lord told me to keep an eye on you....come on then. I know somewhere," he stalked over to a far bookshelf, "close your eyes."

"Okay," and so she did.

He pressed down firmly on a black book until it clicked, as it clicked it pushed out of the bookshelf, his hands taking a firm grip on it. Regulus pulled on the book, and the whole bookcase came with it, "okay, open your eyes."

Evelyn's eyes open, as did her mouth, it felt like she was at Hogwarts again. "Where does it lead?"

"It goes to my own private library," he smirked, stepping into the darkness of the newly revealed corridor, "you coming?"

She smiled, "of course. So did the Dark Lord build this library?"

"He did not build this Manor, it belongs to the Malfoy family, he simply resides here"

"Why here? Does he not have somewhere else?" Evelyn cut in.

"It was offered up by Abraxas Malfoy to be used as a Headquarters."

The name rang a bell Evelyn did not wish to hear, "I know Abraxas, I think he was at Hogwarts with me."

"He was one of the Dark Lords original followers, his loyalty is admirable." Regulus' expression seemed at the intersection of admiration and fear. "Anyway," he shook his head, "come on in to my library."

Library was an overstatement. Regulus led Evelyn into a small cobble room with five piles of books, "is this really worth hiding? Would it not be better to store these in the library, where everyone could read them?"

Regulus tittered, "the others do not share my tastes one could say." He gestured to the book piles, "take your pick. I assume you may need more than one, I do not know when the Dark Lord will next allow you out of your room."

Evelyn didn't hesitate. She made her way to the first pile, lifting up each book with caution. Every book called her name.

"Kreacher does not approve Master Regulus," she turned to see a small house-elf, his eyes bloodshot, staring at her. "Guests do not come down here. Master Regulus the girl must leave."

"Kreacher, go. She is allowed. Do not be rude." Regulus snapped at the house-elf, "go and see if the Dark Lord desires your use again."

And so Kreacher turned, and clicked his fingers, disappearing into the air.

"I apologise for him, he is not used to female company, he serves only me and the Dark Lord."

Evelyn smiled, returning her focus to the books. Eventually she settled on *Lord of the Flies*, *1984* and *The Great Gatsby*.

"Interesting selection," commented Regulus as she stood up, "*1984* is one of my favourites. Anyway, the Dark Lord won't like you being out in the open for this long, I ought to take you back." He ushered her out of the room and back up to where she had been sleeping, "I'll be right outside," he swung the door open for her.

Evelyn stepped inside, placing her books down on top of *The Toadstool Tales* that sat on her armchair.

"Let me know if you need anything," said Regulus as he closed the door, muttering enchantments to secure it.

Evelyn threw herself on the bed, opening up the first page of *1984* and allowing herself to get lost in the pages. She took herself to a new world, letting the world slip away from her. But as she was transported, she found herself not transported into George Orwells' world, but instead her own. She found herself lost in the castle walls of Hogwarts, racing through an unfamiliar cobbled bathroom. Every breath she took overwhelmed her, all she could hear was

a faint hissing noise. And then just as she truly lost herself in the moment, it faded away, as though nothing more than a dream.

Tom Riddle knew he would win over the giants before he even stepped foot in the mountains; even if he couldn't win them over with his charm, his magic was enough to make them second guess their refusal to join his ranks.

As soon as the sunlight left Malfoy Manor, he and his band of most loyal followers set off on their quest. He took with him who he considered his most loyal followers: Abraxas Malfoy and Regulus Black. Both had proven themselves over his conquest of the Wizarding World, with Abraxas loaning his Manor as headquarters and Regulus loaning his house-elf.

"Malfoy, Black, come with me. We have business to attend to." He called out as he made his way out of the Manor, his followers trailing closely behind him.

The trio apparated to the base of the mountains, the only known residence of the giants, the only place that they had ever been sighted. Once they arrived, not a single word was spoken on their journey to the mountains, the group walked in silence, Tom at the front with the rest of them following behind.

As soon as the altitude began to climb, Tom knew he was entering giant territory. Mist covered the mountains, but even with it, he could still see the silhouettes of a group of giants waiting deep within the forest.

"I am Lord Voldemort, I mean you no harm." He called out as he entered. "With me are my followers, Death Eaters, a group which I hope you will come to join. I should hope you are wise enough to hear me out."

From behind the trees, a group of giants began to emerge, with a clear leader at the front of the pack. Although they didn't seem angry yet, Tom knew giants were temperamental. At first, it seemed as though there were only a few giants making their way towards him, but as his eyes began to focus, he noticed what seemed like hundreds.

"Big crowd tonight my Lord," Abraxas spoke from behind him. "No challenge for you of course," he added quickly after.

"Who is your leader?" He called out to the group of giants.

As one began to emerge, another placed their arm in front of him. "Anything you say to one, you say to all." The voice bellowed, echoing throughout the forest.

"Very well." Tom took several steps forwards. He lifted his wand up to his throat where it acted as a microphone, ensuring the giants were able to hear his voice. "As I am sure you are all aware, I am Lord Voldemort. Similarly to you, I have been outcast by the Wizarding World, as have my followers. I come to offer you a chance to join me in my quest. I want to take back what is rightfully mine, what is rightfully *ours*." He paused to take a breath, a smirk playing on his lips; nobody could deny his charm.

"For too long, giants have been outcasts of society for one reason alone, your difference. Wizards are afraid of something they cannot understand and you are that something. But here's where others have gone wrong, you can be understood, just like me, if only one is willing to put in the effort. I am willing." He heard several of the giants begin to mumble.

"Together, we can take down the Ministry, we can claim the positions of power that were stolen from us, we can break down the barriers built to keep us out. A future with me is a future you want to see, I can assure you of that. This is no life you are living, living as an outcast when you are not one. Only when you have been forced out, forced out of the Wizarding World out of fear. I do not have this fear. Fear is for the weak."

He spoke directly to their supposed leader, making eye contact as he spoke. "Your people deserve better than this," He gestured to their dark surroundings. "I give them that."

"Forgive me, boy—"

"I am no boy, I am the Dark Lord and you will refer to me as that should you make the wise choice to join my ranks." He added sharply, curling his lips upwards in an attempt to conceal his annoyance, he thought this task would be easy.

"Forgive me, Lord," he exaggerated, "for not believing you when you seem so convinced of yourself but where is your proof? Where is your army? Where is proof of your actions? All we currently have to go by is what you say."

"Have you not read of the recent sieges? Have you not seen my mark appearing in the sky? All my revolution needs to move forward is you." He could feel his followers shifting behind

him, ready to put their backup plan into action. A Lord never went somewhere expecting things to go as planned, especially when those plans involved unreliable beasts such as trolls. If Tom gave the command, his army would strike.

"Those marks in the sky," said the leader, glancing briefly up at the sky. "They were you?"

Tom scoffed lightly. "Of course they were. No other witch or wizard has the skill to create such a sign of power. The spell you see was created by me, my mind barely had to think and it appeared. My mind combined with your power is enough to take down the Ministry once and for all."

"Prove it."

He scoffed. "you do not question me." But nonetheless, he turned to Regulus Black, "do the honours."

Regulus pointed his wand up to the sky "*Morsmorde*." As soon as he said the words, smoke flew out of the tip of his wand, shifting itself into the shape of a skull, opening its mouth to reveal a serpent.

"Well, what would we gain from this exchange? I give you all my finest warriors and what would I receive in return?"

Tom didn't miss a beat. "Power. Power like you could never imagine. Within my ranks, nobody would think to question you, you would have all your needs tended to: house-elves would wait on you every hour of every day. You would be free from persecution, you could live a life outside of these mountains, a life with no limits. You would have the respect you deserve."

"But how long for? Nobody can live forever, soon we would be forced to come back." The giant stepped forwards, his voice quickly becoming more intense.

"I can. Death is no friend of mine, we shall never greet one another, we shall never cross paths. I am immortal." With that, he knew he had won them over, he knew by the silence that overcame the mountain that he had done it, the giants were on his side.

"Well then my Lord." The giant kneeled down, attempting to get closer to Tom and his followers. "I believe we have an agreement."

Soon after inviting them to join his ranks, Tom began to understand why the giants had been outcasted from society. He did not come to regret his choice, but he came to quickly second guess himself, and Tom Riddle never second-guessed himself. Giants were far more brutal than Tom could ever have imagined. Immediately once they had joined his ranks, Tom and his followers were almost stunned by their power; with one flick of their finger, they could take down a house. Once he saw their handiwork, he knew taking down the ministry would be no trouble at all.

Since joining forces with the giants, havoc had overcome England. Sieges took place all over the country, with Tom leading his army of Death Eaters to victory every time. Throughout the early years of the war, Tom grew his army. He knew he already had the power, but without more affluence in his army, he would get nowhere. He spent years recruiting members of pureblood families, wizards with enough power and affluence to help him win the war. Tom won battle after battle, nobody could even come close to defeating him and he thought they never would.

It was four weeks later before Evelyn was finally allowed out of her room. During her weeks of isolation, she read and she read. Every few days, she woke up to a pile of new books placed outside of her door, and every time she knew exactly who they were from.

"Enjoy your new books?" Regulus asked as he whispered the usual enchantments, opening up the door to her room.

"Absolutely!" Evelyn smiled, "when's my next delivery?"

"Not just yet," Regulus shifted his tone, "the Dark Lord has requested to see you, he's asked me to bring you down."

Evelyn huffed, she had barely had a chance to even talk to Regulus over the past few weeks, let alone infiltrate his mind. As much as they had been able to interact, it hadn't been enough.

"Let's go then," Evelyn followed out after Regulus, rubbing her eyes in the harsh light.

It wasn't long before they arrived back at the office, "the Dark Lord wishes you to go straight in, I will be outside."

Evelyn nodded at him, pushing open the door and stepping into the office. "Nice of you to request my presence," she walked straight in, taking a seat on the grey armchair once more.

"Nice of you to oblige." He turned to face her with a smirk. "*Muffiliato*, I would rather we weren't overheard."

"You know I have no say in the matter," Evelyn crossed her arms at him, sinking back into her seat.

Toms shook his head lightly, "I require information Evelyn, what have you been able to uncover? Time is running out."

"Well," she paused, "when one is locked in a room, it proves a challenge to read the mind of someone who is not in the same room as them."

"You are not trying hard enough," he said through gritted teeth, "I need answers Evelyn."

"Then let me out!" She had had enough of being locked in the same four walls day in day out, "let me roam free. Do not keep me like a pet," she stood up, "I am not one."

"An animal would do better than you are." He rolled his eyes at her, "I will allow you one more week. In that week, you will be confined to the Manor, but free within the Manor, do I make myself clear?"

She nodded.

"At the end of the week, if you report back to me anything less than perfection, you know exactly what will happen."

Evelyn gulped, in her isolation, she had almost entirely forgotten about Sara. "Where is Sara?"

"Your friend is safe, she is in good company," he smirked at her.

"How do I know that?"

"You will have to trust me Ev-"

Evelyn cut him off, "trust you? How could I do that?"

He looked her in the eyes, "you may have forgotten, but there was once a time when you did. There was once a time where I could have asked you anything, and you would have obliged. It is a shame to see how far you have fallen."

"I did not fall, I was pushed." She spoke quickly, "and was it not by you?"

"I did nothing, other than steer you down a path you should have sought for yourself," he paced around the desk, "you were not going to select the path for yourself that you needed to be travelling down."

"And then I forgot it all. You made me forget."

"How do you know that?" He stopped in his tracks.

She fumbled her words, "I-I..."

"You aren't supposed to know that." He gulped, walking towards her. "How do you know?" Every word he said was spoken with more anger than the last.

"I don't know!" Evelyn cried out once he was within touching distance. "I don't know."

"What else do you know?"

"I don't know. I don't know what I know!" Tears began to well in her eyes, "why does it even matter to you?"

"What else do you know?" He repeated to her, grasping her face with his hands. "Tell me."

And suddenly, Evelyn found herself lost in her mind again. Her eyes closed, and when they re-opened, she was no longer in the office, but Tom Riddle was still stood before her. His lips were on hers, brushing away droplets of rain from her flushed lips. Tom pushed his lips further into hers, sending an intoxicating chill across her body, but as soon as the chill reached the end of her body, Evelyn was brought back.

"Tell me," he pressed, snapping her back into an uncomfortable reality, "tell me what you know."

"I don't know!" She collapsed back onto the chair, "I don't remember our supposed time together, and why would I forget two years of my life? Who would want me to forget that other than you?"

"I did not wish you to forget," he took a deep breath, slowing down the conversation.

"Then why did you make me?"

He locked onto her eyes, "you were in too deep Evelyn. There were things you should not have known, things I could not and cannot have you remember, let alone share with the world. It had to be done, it was for the best."

Evelyn closed her eyes, taking a breath before opening them again. "At least we can agree on that." Maybe it was best for her to not remember, maybe it was best that she wasn't plagued with those memories, haunted by who he once was compared to the being that he had become. "But why me?"

"You were special," he glanced at her with furrowed brows, as though trying to decipher what she was feeling, "you were something that intrigued me, a piece of knowledge I didn't hold."

"So I was just information for you to collect?"

"Yes."

Evelyn scoffed.

"At first, that is all you were. I wanted to decipher you. You were an enigma I could not read. But even when I had read every page, you were still interesting." He walked away from her, taking a seat on the edge of his desk, "you became more than just a puzzle piece to collect, you were a trophy, I had won you and I wanted to show you off. I wanted everyone to see what we were. We were powerful."

"And then you became this."

"Evelyn, I was always this." He reminded her, "I was always destined for this greatness, you could have been too. I steered you down this path and you chose another. Power was offered to us both, but you were not wise enough to take it when I was. You could have had

everything I do now," he stared into her eyes, "I saw it in our eyes, you wanted this. But you turned it away."

"I did not want this." She cut him off sharply, "I never wanted what you have. I do not want to be feared how you do, I do not want to hurt others for my own gain."

"But you did, let me show you." He reached out for her hand but she pulled away, "let me show you Evelyn, let me show you what we once were. Let me show you the power you once desired."

And so she did, she let herself intertwine her fingers in his, and the moment she did, he entered her mind.

"Open your mind to me, let me show you how alike we are."

He guided her through her mind, taking her back to her time at Hogwarts, all the way back to the forbidden forest.

"You don't remember this, but I do, I remember the look on your face."

The memory began to play and there she was, stood opposite none other than Astrea Black, wand raised, with nothing but anger in her eyes. She watched as she shot spells at Astrea with no remorse, sparks flying from the end of her wand and colliding with Astrea's body, sending her into a frozen state.

"Do you see that look in your eyes?"

Evelyn looked closer into her younger self's eyes, and she truly did. There was a sparkle in her eyes, a glint of darkness barely hidden.

"You had that look more than once Evelyn, but that is when I truly saw your potential..." he trailed off, releasing her hand, "if only you had been able to live up to it."

"I'm glad I didn't. That wasn't me," Evelyn sulked, trying to shake the image she had just seen, she had the same look in her eye that he did. "I would never have become what you are."

"Evelyn, I do not believe that, I believe, that with the correct guidance, the correct motivations, you would have worked alongside me. We could have had everything."

"I do not want everything." She was happy with what she had, "I do not want what you have."

"You do not now, but as I said, with the right motivations..." He reached out his hand, brandishing a piece of parchment.

"What is this?" She took it in her hand.

"Well," he smirked at her, "it's the right motivations, I believe. Take it to your room...mull it over."

"What about Regulus?" She cast her mind back to their earlier shared words.

"You can forget about that, I believe that this is of more importance. Anyway..." he mumbled, "I believe Regulus will be otherwise occupied."

Tom Riddle knew his followers would do anything for him, if not for loyalty, they would do it out of fear for their lives. Despite knowing that his original Death Eaters were the most loyal, they lacked what he needed.

When the sun rose deep into the winter, he made his way into the hall of the Malfoy Manor where his followers waited obediently at the table. As usual, the moment he entered the hall it silenced. His followers rose from their seats, tilting their heads down towards the floor, not a single eye catching his until he was sat down at the head of the table.

"Be seated." He drew his wand from his pocket, placing it down on the table beside him. He turned to face a disturbed looking woman who sat beside him, her eyes locked onto his with something almost more intense than the fear plastered on the faces of his other followers.

"Bellatrix, how has your mission been coming along?"

"My Lord," she bowed her head down graciously. "No problems at all, very soon it shall be completed I assure you."

"Well, I should hope so. Keep me waiting any longer and you will earn yourself another punishment. I have reached the end of my tether with some of you. Considering we are in a

war, I would expect a greater sense of urgency. You pledged your lives to me, you ought to remember that"

"Yes my Lord. Not to worry-"

"I can assure you there is no worry from my part. In fact, if anyone around this table should be worrying, it should be you Bellatrix. I will not tolerate another failure from you." He turned to face the rest of his followers seated along the table. "The same goes for all of you."

His followers nodded in agreement, their heads tilting down towards the table to avoid his piercing gaze. "Lucius." He called down the table.

A long-haired man near the end of the table looked up, his eyes catching Tom's for a split second before shifting their focus elsewhere. "Yes, my Lord."

"I require something of you, Bellatrix you too." He glanced at the peculiar looking woman sat beside him. "Everyone else must leave."

Without another word, his followers almost jumped from their seats, rushing towards the exit with great haste. Lucius and Bellatrix rose from their seats gracefully, making their way towards the head of the table where Tom sat peacefully.

"Bellatrix, go tend to our prisoners while I speak with Lucius. I wouldn't want you hearing anything that could put you in danger now, would I?" Bellatrix left slowly, glancing back as she left the hall.

Tom turned to face Lucius who stood tall in front of him, no trace of fear lingering on his face as he came eye to eye with him. "My Lord, what was it you required?"

"Lucius, you are one of my most loyal followers as I am sure you are aware." Lucius bowed his head. "I require something of you." He pulled out a small black diary from his robe, placing it on the table before him. "What you see before me is my old diary. It is cleverly charmed in a way that when taken onto the grounds of Hogwarts, it will cause the Chamber of Secrets to be reopened. Once the Chamber is reopened, the Basilisk will continue on its task of purging the school of all mudbloods and it will be made known that I am the true heir of Slytherin."

He lifted the diary in his hands, "Lucius, you must hide this diary. You must keep it away from prying eyes, nobody outside this room can know of its existence. You guard this with your life." He commanded, passing the diary over to Lucius.

"My Lord I assure you I will not fail. I will guard this diary with my life, I will not fail you." Lucius bowed down before him.

Tom cut him off, "when required, I will alert you of your next steps. But until then, keep the diary hidden." He spoke sharply as Lucius raised his head once more. "You will not fail me."

Abruptly, the doors to the hall swung open, causing Lucius to quickly pocket the diary and turn away. "I shall leave you now my Lord." He quickly turned towards the door, walking out of the hall with urgency.

"Bellatrix, do not interrupt me again. Show your Master some respect." He called in a fury out to her as she entered the hall.

"Yes my Lord." She paced towards him quickly, stopping herself once she was a few feet away. "What is it you require of me?"

"I require your Gringotts vault. I require you to hide something of mine inside. I require you to protect it with your life. Defend your vault so that it is impregnable, use whatever enchantments you desire, but the item must be secure. Nobody should ever be able to find it, and if they do, they should not be able to leave with it alive. I expect you shall be able to complete this task." Tom proclaimed.

"Without fail my Lord." Bellatrix grinned at the thought of being given such a task from her Lord. She had been waiting for an opportunity to prove herself and this was just that. Bellatrix considered herself well versed in the art of protective enchantments and with such devotion for her Lord, there was no way she would allow herself to fail.

"If you fail me, there will be consequences," Tom stated.

"I expect nothing less, my Lord. If I fail, I deserve all the punishment you see fit." Although Bellatrix hoped not to fail, she knew that if she did, any punishment designed by Tom would be appropriate. If she failed her Lord, she would accept anything Tom sent her way, she knew she would deserve nothing less.

Tom pulled out the Hufflepuff cup from his other robe pocket, its gold exterior glistening in the daylight that shone in through the windows. "Protect this with your life. I expect you at Gringotts for at least the rest of the day enchanting your vault." He handed over the cup to an eager Bellatrix who manipulated it in her hands before sliding it into her robe pocket. "Now, leave before you bore me."

Bellatrix knew to oblige, she stormed out of the hall of the Malfoy Manor and disappeared in an instant.

A short while after Bellatrix had left the hall, Tom rose from his seat, his robes trailing behind him as he made his way out of the hall. He made his way up the vast staircase in the Manor towards the bedrooms in which his most loyal followers resided. "Regulus." He called as he made his way up.

Instantly, there was a quiet scuffling sound coming from one of the bedrooms, followed by a door swinging open. Regulus Black appeared in the doorway of the bedroom, "My Lord, what is it you desire?" He bowed briefly before him before rising to look Tom in the eye, something few of his followers could muster the courage to do.

"I need your house-elf."

Regulus Black was a loyal Death Eater. It was a well-known fact throughout the community of Death Eaters, something that not a single soul would ever be able to dispute.

Lending his Dark Lord his house-elf was a task that Regulus was more than willing to do, after all, he had done far worse for the past few years without batting an eyelid.

"Kreacher," Tom called to the small house-elf bowing before him. "Take my hand."

Kreacher quickly obliged, grasping his hand and preparing himself for the apparition. Neither party flinched as their bodies were pulled in every direction, the pressure quickly building up as they moved through time. Although Kreacher stumbled when his feet touched the ground, he quickly regained his balance.

Immediately upon arrival, Tom was overwhelmed by the smell of salt and rushing waves. A light breeze ran through his hair as he felt the smell of salt coursing through his body, a smell he remembered all too well from his rather unfortunate childhood.

"Where are we?" Kreacher questioned.

Tom increased his grip on Kreacher's arm, twisting and turning it roughly. "Ask me another question and you will lose a limb."

Without making another sound, he illuminated the tip of his wand, sending a ray of light out before him. He pointed his wand at the cave wall before him and for a brief moment, an arched, white outline appeared as though an explosion was occurring behind the wall.

"Kreacher, I require your arm," Tom said as he reached into his robe pockets. From within them, he pulled out a sharp knife, then proceeded to take Kreacher's arm with his free hand. Without a moment's hesitation, Tom dragged the blade against Kreacher's skin, blood pooling at the tip of the blade as he pulled away. Quickly, the blood from Kreacher's arm began to splatter across the rock face and once again the white line appeared.

Tom tilted his head to the side as the rock face split open to reveal nothingness. Darkness surrounded him as he took a step into the cave. "Follow me," Tom ordered as he began to make his way across the edge of a great black lake. At the middle of the lake, Tom could see a misty green light shining and reflecting in the motionless lake, acting as the only source of light other than that from his wand throughout the entire cave.

Tom lifted his hand into the air, clasping it around what appeared to be thin air to Kreacher. Almost immediately, a coppery chain wrapped itself around Tom's arm as though it were a snake. It slithered around his wrist and began to make its way down to the ground then deep into the black waters. From the depths, it pulled out what was eventually revealed to be a tiny rowboat. As though it could sense its master, the rowboat made its way towards the edge of the riverbank where Tom stood impatiently with Kreacher beside him.

Tom took a seat in the rowboat and Kreacher followed closely behind him, taking a seat at the front. Kreacher leant down to the edge of the boat, "Kreacher if you move another inch I will personally see to it that you lose more than one limb."

"Master, my apologies, I simply assumed you would not wish to steer the rowboat yourself." Kreacher returned to a seated position as the boat began to move.

Tom scoffed. "Bold of you to assume this boat would need steering, you had better not doubt my capabilities again. Do not say another word unless I ask you to!" Although Tom spoke with anger, his expression was that of disinterest rather than the pure rage that Kreacher had anticipated.

Within less than a minute, the boat arrived at the central island from which the green light had been emitted. "Get out of the boat and don't touch the water," Tom commanded. Kreacher scrambled out of the rowboat and onto the small island, closely followed by Tom.

Tom stepped closer to the source of the light: a large basin filled with what Tom knew as poison. With a flick of his wrist, he summoned short goblet into his hand and dipped it into the liquid until it was full. He turned to Kreacher and tilted his head. "Drink." He handed Kreacher the goblet.

Kreacher took the goblet into his small hands and lifted it to his lips, there was no scent but as soon as it touched his lips he could feel himself begin to gag. It was as though he was drinking metal, every ounce of liquid clung to the back of his throat as though it was curdling inside of him. As soon as he had finished, Kreacher fell to the floor, coughing and gagging.

"Again," Tom commanded him. "We are not done yet," he snatched the goblet from Kreacher's hands and submerged it once again into the poison. He handed the goblet straight back to Kreacher with a smirk. As soon as the goblet was out of his hands, Tom drew his wand from his pocket, waving it lightly as he muttered "*Silencio*." Tom was uninterested in hearing Kreacher's sound-effects, they were merely an inconvenience to him. Especially with so much poison left, he knew that he would surely drown Kreacher if he had to listen to him for any longer.

For almost an hour, the same process entailed. Tom filled the cup with poison, handed it off to Kreacher, then took it back and repeated the process. "I thought this would have killed you by now." Tom wrinkled his nose. "How interesting. Perhaps I ought to strengthen the poison."

By the time Kreacher was on the final goblet, he was a shell of who he once was. His eyes were sunken into his face, his arms barely lifting off the ground as he reached for the goblet. Kreacher was dying and there was no denying that. He cried out in pain, his arms outstretched, pleading to Tom.

"Enjoy yourself," Tom said as he tilted his head. From his robe pocket, he brandished a locket, dropping it into the basin. He took his wand, dipping the tip of it into the basin and without a word, filling it back up with posion.

He gave one last look at Kreacher before turning away. "I know I will."

And as he left, Kreacher sunk to the ground, his arms outstretched to the surrounding water. As he reached his hand into the water, Kreacher felt something pull on his arm and he fell deep into the army of Inferi.

As soon as the door shut behind her, Evelyn opened up the piece parchment. She paced as she unfolded it, perching on the end of her bed with a deep breath.

*"Dear Evelyn," She read, noticing the familiar comfort of her mothers handwriting. "by the time you are reading this, we will be long gone." A tear began to form in her eyes, "you will be aware that I was working on tracking down Helga Hufflepuffs cup while I was still alive, this was under the strict instruction of the Ministry of Magic, who believe it to possess magical powers. After several months of failure on this, I contracted your father to help, and that is when I finally had a breakthrough, I found a living relative, someone who might possess the cup. Ever since this, someone has been on our tail, someone has been following us and I fear we will not have much more time together. I fear he will claim our lives soon. This is not the end my child. I love you my dear child, be safe."*

Evelyn took a deep breath. In her hands, she had her mothers final words, the information her mother had thought to pass onto Evelyn, knowing she would soon be dead. But reading through it, it meant nothing to her. It has solved no riddle, answered no questions, all it had done was remind her of what she already knew and reassure her of the futile fact of her parents death.

"Merlin!" She yelled in a rage, throwing the parchment across the room. She could feel the rage bubbling up inside of her, each question filling her to the brim with anger, with confusion, with an aching sense of nothingness.

As the parchment flew through the air, she noticed the emblem on the back, the Ravenclaw crest stamped firmly in the centre, surrounding by a pool of blue ink. Evelyn knew both her parents had been proud of the house during their time at Hogwarts, but her brows furrowed at

the familiar site of the crest. She reached her arm out to the parchment, tracing the emblem with her dainty fingers, "what does this mean?" She muttered to herself hopelessly.

Knowing who she had received the information from, it likely meant nothing, but an ache inside of her longed for more. Years ago, she had been able to finally put her parents death behind her, she had been able to stop the weight of it pulling her down beneath the surface of the waves, but now it was back, just as she was able to emerge from the waves, the weight tugged at her once more.

Evelyn closed her eyes, sighing. She wanted more, she wanted answers, she needed them. Part of her felt empty, unable to solve the enigma of her parents death, but she had been able to cast that aside for so long, she had been able to lock it away and burn the key. But now, with nothing but fear to keep her company, she found some sort of peace in the letter. She traced her mothers handwriting with a faint smile, all she longed for was a chance to hold her mother one more time, a chance to speak to her, to just be able to see her. All Evelyn wanted was the piece of her puzzle that was so cruelly taken away from her all those years ago. She threw the parchment to the ground, casting it out of her mind.

Three days later, Evelyn tried again. She sat with the parchment for hours, reading over every single last letter, hoping, praying for a piece of new information. Every time she read the letter again, she felt the tears begin to fill her eyes. She needed to extinguish the sadness from her body, she needed a release. All the feelings inside her body were beginning to overflow. As she closed her eyes, a tear fell onto her palms. She could hear his voice in her head, only younger.

*"Haven't you heard of Helga Hufflepuffs cup?" He asked her with a puzzled gaze.*

*"It is believed that the cup possesses powers, nobody knows what powers those might be, but it is highly sought after. Legend has it that it is passed down to Hufflepuffs descendants, meaning that if there is one, they would have the cup. Whoever was searching that cup likely wasn't searching for it to display, they presumably wanted it for their own gain, to utilise the powers it held. If your mother saw who they were, she would have been able to stop them I assume."*

Evelyn blinked, her mother and father had died, all for a cup with supposed powers, a cup with an unknown location. Someone had taken it, and that someone had killed her parents. She couldn't help but let more tears stream from her eyes, watching as they pooled onto the parchment on her lap.

As here tears merged, Evelyn noticed a faint silver glow emerging from the parchment beneath them, every tear adding to the glow. Looking deeper into the pool of tears, Evelyn began to notice the silver glow forming a shape. Swirling silver streams began to curve across the parchment, slowly twisting and turning into lettering.

*"Orion Black."* she read. It was a name she recognised, but not through personal connection. The House of Black was one of the Sacred Twenty-Eight pure blooded families, one of those who had quickly become loyal to the blood purification of the Wizarding World, who had been attracted by the allure of evil, the allure of power.

Evelyn stood up, "Regulus." She called out, banging on her door, she needed to be let out, she needed to talk to Tom. "Regulus!" She yelled again, pressing her ear against the door to see if she could hear him outside, but it was silent. "Regulus?" Her voice increased in pitch, "I need to get out."

"Regulus?" She called out, pushing against the door with her body. Evelyn reached out her hand, pressing against the door handle, causing it to click: someone had forgotten the enchantments.

She pressed against the handle and pushed open the door. Evelyn felt refreshed being able to leave her room, she clutched the parchment close to her body, glancing out of the room.

"Hello?" She called out before stepping into the empty corridor.

It had been so long since she'd been out of her room, she felt nervous as she felt the waves of fresh air hit her lungs. Evelyn made her way through the corridor, down the marble staircase and towards the office, "hello?"

"I was wondering how long it would take you." He turned to face her, "you know, your door has been unlocked for days now."

"Nice of you to let me know." Evelyn stepped into the office, dropping the parchment on his desk, "now, let me know something else, who is Orion Black?" She sat on the edge of his desk, crossing her arms, "and what does he have to do with my parents' death?"

"Orion Black is the father of Sirius and Regulus Black," he began, "he knew your parents I believe."

Evelyn leaned in, "Regulus? As in the boy who was guarding my room?"

"The very same."

"Tell me about his father." She pressed him, "how do you know he killed my parents? How do you know any of this?"

"After we parted ways, it had always been on my mind you see," he looked at her intently, "I thought it would bring you closure to know."

"But it's been years."

He nodded, "I know."

Evelyn looked at him to elaborate but nothing. "So how do you know? Is it true?"

"It is true. During my years abroad I learnt more about Helga Hufflepuffs cup, and that is how I heard of Hepzibah Smith."

"And then you killed her..." Evelyn trailed off.

"Yes, I did. But before then, I found the others who had previously searched for the cup, I found a man called Orion Black. Him and I had a wonderful conversatio-"

"I have a peculiar feeling it was not so wonderful for him." She shuddered at the thought of what he had done.

Tom smirked, "I did what had to be done, I found out what was needed. Not only did I secure what I had been searching for, but also what you had."

"What did you want with Helga Hufflepuffs cup?"

"That is a story for another day Evelyn, for now, we talk about you." He perched himself at the other end of the desk, "after my conversation with Orion, he confessed to the kills."

"He confessed?" Evelyn furrowed her brows, "but why? Why did he kill my parents?"

"I am glad you asked," he stood up turning towards a door at the back of the room, "follow me."

She blinked. Without another word, she was hot on his heel, she followed him out of the office and down a staircase.

"See for yourself..." He reached his hand out, waving it over a door and causing it to swing open. He looked at her, motioning for her to enter, "go on then."

Evelyn took a cautious step into the room, her mouth falling open. In the centre of the room, sat an expressionless middle-aged man. His hair sat matted around his face, his eyes bloodshot.

"Is-is that him?" She stuttered, taking a deep breath.

"Yes. He's been waiting for you." He took a step inside, making his way toward Orion, "haven't you?" When Orion didn't reply, he took his wand from his sleeve, pressing it into Orion's neck, "haven't you?"

"Yes," his voice was hoarse, crackling as he spoke.

"Why?" Evelyn took a step closer towards him, "why? Why did you kill them?" Inside of her, a tsunami began to form, waves rising and falling with every breath she took. "Why, tell me..." She pleaded with him, "please."

"He cannot tell you." Evelyn's heart dropped, "but I can show you," he outstretched his hand, "take my hand." Without question, Evelyn took his hand in hers, "now close your eyes." Tom reached out his wand, placing it into Orion's neck, "*Legilimens*."

Evelyn felt her body being pulled away from her as the world around her fell away. And when she opened her eyes again, she was no longer in the small dungeon.

She stood alongside Tom, watching on as a younger version of Orion Black brandished his wand from his pocket. Orion turned to face his prisoners, who sat on the cobbled floor, pained expressions on both of their faces.

"That's my mother, my father." Evelyn felt her face fall as she saw them sat helpless.

"Tell me where the cup is." Orion snapped at them, pointing his wand at Evelyns mother, with a smirk.

"No," her father moved himself in front of her, "we don't know, we promise! Please," he took his wifes hand in his, "please spare her."

"Tell me where it lies, tell me what you know."

"Please," Evelyn watched on as her father pleaded for their lives. "Please spare her, spare us."

"It appears you need some... motivation." Orion looked at Evelyns father, "stand aside," he moved his wand, sending her father across the floor. With a grin on his face, her pointed his wand at the quivering girl, "Crucio."

Evelyn turned away, she couldn't watch. "Why didn't they just tell him?"

"I believe they did not know, I believe that their progress had halted. They knew of Hepzibah Smith, but not her location. Perhaps their peculiar sense of humanity wanted to protect her." He turned to face her, you can look again."

She turned back. Her mother was wimpering in the corner of the room, her father with tears in his eye.

"Please, we know nothing. Spare us, I beg." Her father began to sob, "she knows nothing, let her go." He reached his arm out for his wife, begging and pleading for their lives.

"You must know something. Tell me of the cup, tell me of its location. Tell me now!"

"Please..."

Orion cut him off, "stop speaking." He paced up and down for a few moments, "I am finished with you. *Avada Kedavra*." He watched motionless as the man fell, his face colliding with the floor.

Evelyn screamed, falling to the floor with her father, reaching her hand out to him.

"Now, speak," he turned to Evelyns mother. But her face was blank, Evelyn watched as her mother faded from existence.

Evelyn turned away, "I can't watch." She gulped, "I want to go back," she took his hand, "please."

Tom didn't say a word, instead clutching onto her hand as the room fell from around them. As soon as they were back, he dropped her hand.

She gulped, "he killed them. He killed my parents." She looked at Orion, "you killed them! You're a monster, you're a murderer. They knew nothing and you killed them!" Before Evelyn even blinked, her fist collided with Orions face.

"Evel-"

"Don't," she cut him off. Evelyn couldn't stop, there was a spark coarsing through her veins. Her hand collided with Orions face again, and again, and again.

Tom grabbed her wrist, "Evelyn, we aren't muggles." He reached into his pocket, brandishing her wand and sliding it into her hands.

Evelyn looked down at her wand before turning back to face Orion. "*Incarcerous*," she watched as ropes tightened themselves around his body, squeezing and crushing his body.

"You can do better than that," she heard Tom call out from behind her.

"*Petrificus Totalus*"

"*Stupefy*"

Evelyn stopped speaking, every flick of her wand sending out a new spell. Sparks of red collided with Orion's body, burning his flesh.

"Finish him." Tom placed a hand her shoulder, "do it."

Evelyn gulped. She clutched her wand tightly, taking a breath. "A-Av." She took another breath, "Av-" Tears began to stream from her eyes, her mind was overloaded, it couldn't compute another action, another act of violence against another. "I can't."

"You can," he stood behind her, whispering lightly. "Do it."

"Avad-" Every breath she had been holding off came to her at once, "I can't do it."

He growled at her, taking his own wand out of his pocket, "stand aside." He took a step forward, standing before the battered man, "what a foolish man," he smirked, "*Avada Kedavra*." A jet of green light shot into Orion's bruised body, claiming his life. "Let us go," he took Evelyn's hand, leading her back into the office, pulling her away from the body.

"I-" Evelyn's body trembled, "I killed him."

"Evelyn, you did not kill."

"I did, it's my fault. I loaded the gun, and handed it off to someone else. I wasn't even strong enough to do it myself." She dropped to her knees, "I am a murderer, a killer, a monster."

"No." He dropped to her level, placing his hand under her chin, "look at me. You did not kill."

"B-but," she hesitated, wiping away the tears from her face, "part of me wanted to."

His lips curved upwards, "you wanted revenge, he took something from you, and it is only fair you took something back."

"I-" Evelyn looked him in the eyes.

"You did what needed to be done." He stared into her hazel eyes intently, "it's okay."

Evelyn felt her primal desires overwhelmed her, "I.." But she couldn't find the words, instead, she let herself lean in, she let her lips find his. And as their lips collided, everything around them fell away, there was only them in the world; their vulnerable selves crashing like ocean waves. At his lips' touch she blossomed like a flower.

He pulled away, "Evelyn."

"No," she placed her finger on his lips, "please."

She leaned in again, and all it took was one touch. One touch and the electricity ran across her skin, invigorating her. Her lips found their way to his neck, adding fuel to the raging fire. As her hands traced his back, pulling him closer towards her, everything around her meant

nothing. Both of them move in synchronisation, as if their bodies knew exactly what to do, as if they had been there before.

His finger caressed her skin lightly, as if he feared a heavier touch could break her. In an instant, he pressed his body against hers, pushing her down against the cobbled floor. He was in control.

He ran his hands through her auburn hair, unbuttoning her dress with haste. His lips made their way to her neck, kissing with such passion, she could no longer feel the cool chill of the cobbled stone against her spine. His hands traced the curves of her body, edging down her body before pausing momentarily.

"Don't stop," Evelyn begged him.

And so, he didn't.

When Evelyn awoke the next morning, she was somewhere entirely different. Instead of waking in the box room she had lived in for the past few months, she was now in an entirely different realm of luxury.

Even just the feeling of the silk sheets against her body made Evelyn feel a sense of bliss, such bliss she almost forgot where she was, it felt as though, there in that moment, lost under the bedsheets, she could simply forget the world around her.

With a deep breath, she slid out of bed, making her way towards a chair in the corner of the room. She scooped up a folded dress, slipping it on and shuddering at the feeling of the cold fabric against her bare skin.

"Good morning."

Evelyn jumped, her heart beating out of her chest. But as she turned up to look at the voice, it wasn't who she had expected. "S-Sara?" She furrowed her brow at the sight of her old school friend. "Sara!" She rushed towards her, embracing the girl in her arms. Sara lightly placed her arms around Evelyn's dainty body. "You're okay," Evelyn pulled away, "you're okay?"

"I'm fine Evelyn." Sara said coldly, "the Dark Lord wouldn't hurt me."

"The Dark Lord." Evelyn grimaced at the name, "you call him that? You call him what his army of followers do?"

Sara didn't respond with words, instead, raising her sleeve on her left arm. She smiled down at the jet black tattoo on her wrist.

"Merlin." Evelyn wanted to look away, but she felt pulled towards the symbol. She reached out towards Sara's wrist, "c-can I?"

"Please." Sara brandished her wrist, placing it in Evelyn's hand.

"I've seen this before, in the sky." She recalled the night of the siege, she saw the same image burnt into the night sky.

"The Dark Lord is ingenious in that way," Sara pulled her arm away, "he created the spell himself."

"Why?"

"It's a sign, a symbol of loyalty to him. He can use it to call his followers, he can have an army on command, why would he not?"

Evelyn scowled, "so you're a part of this? You follow him?" She thought back to when she had seen Sara all those weeks ago, a terrified shell of a human had stood before her, "so when I saw you...what was that?"

"It was an act." She rolled her eyes, "the Dark Lord knew you had such weakness for your friends, so I volunteered as bait."

"And you were excellent bait," Evelyn turned to see him entering the room with a smirk. "But now, I have little use for you," he paused, "perhaps you may take over the cooking."

Sara looked confused, but nonetheless, she bowed. "Of course my Lord. I would be happy to serve you in any way."

"Now leave," he gestured towards the door, "I need to talk to Evelyn alone."

Sara strutted out of the room, loudly closing the door on her way out.

"What is going on?" Evelyn said sharply at him, "what is Sara doing here?"

Tom walked towards her, "your friend is here of her own accord. She saw the appeal in my lifestyle, as have many others befo-

Evelyn cut him off, "is she a prisoner?"

He shook his head, "no, she is a follower."

"Is that not the same thing?"

"Evelyn," he took a deep breath, "you ask many questions. No, it is not the same thing, your friend has chosen to support me, she has chosen me, she has chosen my ideals, she has chosen the right side."

"How is this the right side?"

"Why don't we discuss this another time," he took a step closer to her, "I have something we must do together."

"Together?" Evelyn hadn't left the Manor in so long, she longed for the fresh air, the breeze on her skin.

"Yes," he gripped her arm, "don't think of running."

Before she even had a chance to reply, she felt the world fall around her, her body twisting in every direction before her knees fell to the ground with a thud. Evelyn clutched her stomach, gagging. "Perhaps some warning next time?" She looked up at the oddly composed Tom.

"Perhaps," his lips curled upwards at her discomfort.

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"Perhaps," his lips curled upwards at her discomfort. He outstretched his arm, "get up," he pulled her back to her feet.

"Apparating makes me queasy." She placed her hand back on her stomach.

He simpered, "it always did."

"We've apparated before?" Evelyn looked up at him, "when? Where did we go?"

He began walking away from her, "follow me. We're going back to somewhere we went before."

Evelyn rolled her eyes, jogging to catch up with him, "why won't you answer me?"

"I will, in time."

He didn't speak again until they reached a building half-hidden amongst the damaged greenery. It was almost pitch black, the trees blocking all the light from shining onto the building. "*Lumos*." A thin stream of light shone from the tip of his wand, illuminating the house.

"I recognise this." It felt familiar to her. She ran her hands across the mossy walls, "I've been here before."

Tom nodded, "we came together many years ago." He stepped into the house, "come on in."

Evelyn followed him cautiously, "why are we here? If we've been before, why are we back?"

He reached into his pocket, pulling out a gold ring inset with a black stone, "we are here to return something."

Evelyn looked down at the ring, "I recognise that ring. I've seen it before."

"Yes, I assume you have," he said simply, reaching into his pockets to reveal a small golden box. He placed the ring into the box, tapping the lid gently.

"Don't you want that anymore?"

"It has served its purpose," he reached down to the floor, removing a loose floorboard, "it will be safer here." He slid the golden box under the floorboards, "come on."

Evelyn followed him outside, "why did you bring me?"

But he ignored her, instead raising his wand and beginning to mutter protective enchantments. *"Cave inimicum. Protego Maxima. Fianto Duri. Repello Inimicum. Salvio hexia. Cave inimicum. Protego Maxima. Fianto Duri. Repello Inimicum. Salvio hexia. Cave inimicum. Protego Maxima. Fianto Duri. Repello Inimicum. Salvio hexia."* He lowered his wand, turning to face Evelyn once again, "I thought you might enjoy the outing."

"Well..."

"Did you not?"

Evelyn sighed, "I did. But now what?" She wasn't sure what this meant, if she had been allowed to leave once, would she leave again?

"What do you mean?" He took her hand, "we're apparating again."

The world twisted around them, forces pulling Evelyn's body in every single direction until she landed with a thud back in the bedroom. "Better on the warning." Still, she clutched her stomach, sitting herself on the edge of the bed. She took a deep breath, "I mean, what happens now, with me?"

"Well," he took a seat beside her on the bed, "there are options."

"Could I leave?" She wasn't sure what she could do if she left, but staying was equally conflicting.

He shook his head, "no."

"So I'm a prisoner?"

"No," he said, "if you didn't want to stay, you would be, but I can read you Evelyn, you're the same as you were back then, you don't want to leave."

"I just want answers." Her memory was filled with missing pieces, pieces that he was holding away from her.

"Answers do not always bring the comfort you seek." He stated simply, "you may find you are better off not knowing some things." He stood up, making his way over to a box in the corner of the room, "however, should you find yourself longing for answers," he pulled out a small phial filled with a silvery extract, "then this holds the answers you desire." He placed the phial in her hands, "there is a Pensieve in the study on the second floor, should you need to know."

"I think I ought to introduce you to everyone." Tom said as he walked into the room a few hours later.

Evelyn tilted her head at him, "pardon?"

"Yes," he nodded, pacing before her, "I can't have you roaming free in the castle if people are not aware that you are here. What could they think should they find you? You would be killed."

"So I have to meet your Death Eaters?" She gulped, "I have to meet your army of killers?"

"Yes. But they would not dare hurt you, not under my rule. That, I can assure you. They follow me, they obey me, they would not dare defy me." He dropped his wand from his sleeve, clutching it in his hand.

"How many? How many must I meet?"

He thought for a second, "only those who live here. The others you can be hidden from." He stared deeply at her expression, "they cannot hurt you," he said reassuringly.

"How do you know that?" She tapped her fingers against her palm, "they could simply defy you! It's only your word, it can be broken."

"No. They cannot defy me, they would not. They know what would happen if they dared, they would not make that mistake again."

Evelyn wished he was right, she prayed; but she had heard of what his followers were capable of, she had seen it with her own eyes. She had seen the horror of their actions, she had seen the lives that they had claimed. She had seen the horror and she knew it could easily be her at the end of one of their spells.

"Shall we go then? They are in the meeting hall."

"Yes," she nodded apprehensively, "we shall."

Evelyn followed him again through the vast halls of the Malfoy Manor, trailing behind him as they reached the hall. She could feel her heart beating out of her chest, but nonetheless, she closed her eyes, took a deep breath, and reopened them ready for anything.

"Let us enter." He looked at her quickly before pushing the black doors open.

As soon as he entered the hall, the atmosphere changed. The few individuals stood in the hall bowed instantly, dropping their heads at him as though in prayer. "My Lord," they echoed across the hall.

"Be seated," he commanded them, causing them to all gather around the elongated table in the centre of the room, "I have to inform you of something and I expect your loyalty in my decision."

"Of course my Lord." His followers shook their heads, baffled at the thought of disobeying their leader.

"I bring with me a guest," he gestured towards the doorway where Evelyn stood timidly, "some of you may know her from our time at Hogwarts, some of you may not. Regardless of this, I expect your undivided loyalty to my decision, question me and there will be

consequences." He beckoned Evelyn to come over, and so she did, making her way to his side. "You will show loyalty to her, should she require anything it shall be granted. She may not however, leave the Manor."

Evelyn's heart fell, she wanted to feel the sand in between her toes, the wind in her hair, she longed to be outside again. The taste of the outdoors had almost done her more harm than good, she had been content in the Manor, her small bedroom had kept her occupied. She had become accustomed to those four walls, and then suddenly they were no longer. She had been allowed a taste of freedom and now, she wanted more.

"Have I made myself clear?"

Evelyn found herself wanting to nod along with his followers, the message felt for her as much as them, it was a message, she wasn't leaving, not today or tomorrow, or ever. While they were nodding, she took the chance to explore the faces sat at the table.

She recognised several from her days at Hogwarts, one more than others. Astrea Black sat at the table with a grimace plastered across her face. She looked almost the same as she had all those years ago, her stark black hair falling down to her waist, her petite figure perched on the edge of her seat. Physically, Evelyn assumed she was unchanged, and by the look on her pale face, her hatred for Evelyn had not faltered.

Beside her sat Abraxas Malfoy, someone she knew by reputation. For generations, the Malfoy family had been well known, and despite meeting Abraxas at Hogwarts, she didn't become entirely aware of his existence until her days working at the Ministry of Magic where their paths had crossed briefly where she had required information from the Department of Mysteries and had stumbled into his office for information.

"You already know Abraxas and Astrea," Tom looked at his followers with pride, "that," he pointed to the younger white haired boy beside Abraxas, "is Lucius Malfoy."

Lucius looked up at Evelyn uncomfortably, looking to his father, as though for approval before looking back to Evelyn.

"That is Bellatrix Lestrange." He motioned his wand towards a fanatical looking woman, her unkempt curls blocking off her face, but even what Evelyn could see frightened her. Evelyn had heard of Bellatrix Lestrange long before today, she had been one of the only identifiable Death Eaters, one of the only of Tom's followers known to the Ministry.

"And finally, Preto Parkinson." He signalled to the final individual sat at the table. Preto stared nervously at Evelyn through his glasses until she was able to pull herself away. "That is all. Leave." Tom bellowed, "and remember what I said."

One by one, his Death Eaters stalked out of the hall, as soon as they had left, Tom turning to face her. "See, they will not hurt you."

Evelyn raised her brows at him, "you saw how they looked at me."

"Astrea looked as though she wanted you dead," he almost smiled, "but she would not dare. You have my word."

"I would like to see her try." Evelyn scoffed.

He raised his brows "really? That could be arranged."

"Her having me killed?"

"Not having, but trying."

"Are you talking about a Duel?" Evelyn recalled her last duel with Astrea, "if I remember correctly, I was victorious last time."

"That was many years ago." He cut her off. "Astrea has gotten stronger."

"As have I," she retorted.

"So then, you wish to duel Astrea Black?"

She nodded at him, "but when I win-"

"If."

"When I win, I want something from you."

He smirked at her confidence, "and what would that be?"

"I want to see the ocean again." In her youth, she had always lived by the ocean, but it had been years since she had been back home, it had been years since she had let herself float in the ocean, since she had tasted the salty air, since she had felt the sand between her toes.

"You mean your grandmothers home, the one by the sea?"

"How do you-" but she stopped herself, remembering the phial in her pocket. "Yes, my grandmothers home."

"Then it is settled, tonight we duel."

At nightfall, Evelyn made her way into the hall of the Malfoy Manor with her wand poised. All her years as an Auror had been leading to this moment, she had spent years perfecting her duelling abilities in the instance she was targeted by dark magic, and tonight it would all pay off.

She watched as Abraxas and Lucius Malfoy entered the room, "excited for the duel?" She asked them apprehensively, shaking off her nerves.

"I should hope Astrea deals with you as a blood traitor should be dealt with," Lucius muttered at her, looking at his father briefly before placing themselves in the corner of the room on Astreas side.

Evelyn gulped, shaking her head. She hoped Tom would at least be on her side, "are you excited?" She asked as he made his way over to her.

"It shall be a good fight I hope." He nodded at her, "I should hope you watch yourself, these floors will be a nightmare to clean your blood off."

"Was that a joke?" She raised her brows at the infamous Dark Lord.

"Perhaps."

"I think it can be assumed that it would not be you scrubbing the blood off these precious floors," she looked down at the glistening hardwood, "I would assume you have a servant for that."

"I'm sure one of the house elves would oblige."

"If you asked them nicely." She finished his sentence.

Tom rolled his eyes at her, "do I not always ask nicely?"

"No, you do not." She said simply before taking her place at one end of the room in preparation for the duel.

"Finally ready?" Astrea called out with a manical grin, clutching her wand in her hand.

"Are you?" Evelyn retorted, making her way towards the centre of the room in front of Astrea.

"Always."

"Duellers, I think we ought to go over some ground rules before we begin," Tom bellowed, looking over at Astrea. "You have duelled before many years ago, so I expect you to keep it interesting. Do not leave this room, but do not bore me."

Evelyn chuckled, "I wouldn't dare."

"Now, basic duel etiquette please, and Astrea," he turned to look at the manic woman, "no Unforgivables."

Astrea nodded, bowing lightly at him, "yes my Lord."

"Let the duel begin." He raised his arms, lighting up every corner of the room with small floating candles, "as always, first, you must bow."

Evelyn dropped her head at Astrea, twirling her hands behind her as Astrea jerked her head awkwardly.

"Raise your wands, and turn." He commanded, "you will duel on the count of three, no sooner," he glared quickly at Astrea.

"One

two

three."

Evelyn turned on her heel rapidly, "*Expelliarmus*" It was a beginner spell, but nonetheless one she was grateful to have in inventory.

Astrea reacted instantly, unfazed by the green sparks shot from Evelyn's wand, reflecting it with a shield. "*Stupefy*" she shot the stunning spell directly at Evelyn.

Evelyn rebutted, blocking the stun with the wave of her wand. "*Brachiabindo*", she watched as Astrea became trapped, barely able to move herself, let alone her wand.

Astrea growled, "*Emancipare*", she broke free, shaking her head to compose herself. She looked at Evelyn with a snarl, pointing her wand at the dancing flames in the fireplace "*Engorgio*," the flames doubled inside, the roaring heat causing beads of sweat to form on both their faces. Without a word, Astrea lifted the flames with her wand, sending them soaring at Evelyn.

Evelyn didn't have time to think, she jumped out of the way, falling to the ground with a groan as she felt the flames on her skin. Jumping to her feet, she readied her wand, "*Aqua Eructo*." Water streamed from the tip of her wand, extinguishing the flames before she lifted her wand to Astrea and the stream quickly became an eruption, moving with such force Astrea could barely keep her footing.

Water fell all around her, imprisoning her, "*Glacius*," she called out, freezing the stream of water shooting from Evelyn's wand. Pointing her wand at the icy prison she yelled out, "*Bombarda*", the ice shattered in an instant, colliding with the hard-wood floors and sliding towards Evelyn.

Evelyn looked down at the sharp ice at her feet with a grin, "*Alarte Ascendare*," she called out, watching as the ice rose up above her, floating towards, hovering over her head for a moment before dropping onto her.

Astrea screeched as the sharp ice collided with her body, "you bitch." She wiped off the bloodied ice shards from her body, scowling at Evelyn. "*Avis*," she waved her wand, creating a flock of birds around her, "*Oppungo*." The bird flew towards Evelyn with a loud blast.

Evelyn scoffed at the birds powering towards her, deflecting them without a second thought and sending them soaring back towards Astrea.

Astrea quickly fended off the birds, waving her wand violently as each one charged at her. She looked up at the floating candles above her, "*Expluso!*" She yelled, and the candles shattered, pieces of them falling across the hall, lighting little fires everywhere.

Evelyn jumped up, moving out of the way of the falling candles and brandishing her wand, "*Aqua Eructo.*" She pointed at the fires, dousing each one with the water streaming from her wand.

Before each fire had been smothered, Astrea whipped out her wand, "*Engorgio.*" She watched manically as the fire expanded, trapping Evelyn in the corner of the room.

Evelyn stepped backwards, grimacing as the fire touched her skin, "*Diminuendo!*" She screamed, shrinking down the fire again. Evelyn sighed, taking a moment to take in her surroundings, looking for her next move. When she saw it, she smiled, "*Finestra*", a small bean of silver light shot out of her wand, colliding with the window behind Astrea, shattering it upon contact.

Astrea turned to look at the shattered window, her mouth open. "How embarrassing." She turned back to Evelyn, "Flipе-"

Evelyn cut her off, beating her to it "*Flipendo.*" Astrea shot backwards, falling through the shattered window, "not so embarrassing now, is it?" She smiled, turning to face her audience, "Astrea left the grounds," she pointed to the astonished Astrea who sat in the broken window. "Surely I win?"

"Interesting." Tom turned to look at Abraxas and Lucius, "what do we think?"

Lucius stayed silent, looking to his father. "Astrea did leave the room...."

"But she didn't quit," Astrea rose from the bed of broken glass, wand poised, "the duel doesn't end until one cannot continue." She stepped through the window, the glass crushing under her weight, "*Expelliarmus.*"

Evelyn deflected the spell, rapidly turning back to face Astrea.

*"Expelliarmus."*

*"Stupefy"*

Evelyn shot backwards into the wall with a groan. "Baubillious!" She called out as she stood up, clutching her side with her free hand.

But Astrea was too quick, *"Verdillious!"*

Their spells collided like a cannon blast, the green and white lights blending together in one blinding glow. Evelyn felt the pain in her side growing stronger, but she had to hold on, Astrea too was wounded, it was now just who could outlast the other.

For what felt like hours, the colours remained entangled, until for one moment, for a split second, Astrea faltered, flying backwards into the ground with a thud, unconscious.

"I win." Evelyn said, breathless, before collapsing to the floor with a grin.

When Evelyn awoke, she felt pain. It coarsed around her body before she even had a chance to open her eyes, it was all she could feel. Like a fire spreading across a forest, it moved with anger, not grace, shooting down her limbs with no mercy.

"Good afternoon to you too Evelyn," she heard the familiar voice of Tom call out to her.  
"Shame to see you lose last night."

That got her riled up, opening her eyes with a frown, she shot him a glare, "lose? Astrea went down before me!"

"Perhaps," he paused momentarily, "while that may be true, you went down too."

"That is not the rule! I won."

"Well...." he took a breath, pausing, "as you kept it entertaining, we shall say you won, but Astrea won't be happy to hear that."

Evelyn feigned hurt, "how sad. I am truly devastated for her."

"So, we may go to the beach."

Evelyn had almost forgotten about the beach, in the heat of the duel, she had simply wanted to win for the power, for the reputation, but now she remembered the ocean and it made her heart feel full.

"Really?"

"Evelyn, I always keep my word," he stood up from the end of the bed, "how about we go in the evening?" Evelyn nodded, "meet me back here at sunset."

"You mean...." She stopped to smile, "I can explore the Manor?"

"Yes," he nodded as he made his way to the door, "as long as you stay inside."

Evelyn grinned, "thank you," she whispered as he walked out of the door.

Once she heard him go back down the stairs, she emerged from the bed and made her way into the bathroom. Shivering as her bare feet touched the cobbled stone, she dropped her robe, exposing her bare body. Evelyn ran her hands across her legs, wincing as she reached the bumpy grooves of her burnt flesh. She didn't realise how much damaged Astrea had done.

Hesitantly, she made her way into the shower and let herself be free in the water. Despite the burning sensation on her legs, Evelyn felt safe. She was in a cocoon of the soothing cascade, an embrace of the sparkling water.

It wrapped itself around her, filling her with safety like no other. She had always adored the water, whether it was the ocean, the lake, or simply a bath, she loved the way she became weightless; it was like that in her dreams too.

When she emerged from the shower, she wrapped herself in a black silk dress and let herself sink back into the bed. Soon she would be back by the ocean, the place she had been raised, the place where her life had once been perfect.

"Evelyn," she heard Tom call her name, waking her from her daydream, "it's time to go."

"Already?" She rubbed her eyes, sliding out from under the covers into her black shoes.

He looked at her intently, "you've been asleep for hours, I thought it best to let you sleep." Reaching out his arm, he lifted her up to standing, "here is your warning."

Evelyn blinked, and they were somewhere new. She clutched her stomach, "thank you for the warning at least."

"No problem," he took her hand, "shall we?" He led her into the quaint grey cabin, "its been uninhabited since your grandmother passed," he said, as though he were a tour guide.

"It's just like how I left it all those years ago..." Evelyn ran her hands across the familiar grey wood, "it still smells like home." She took a deep breath in, inhaling the sweet salty air.

"It's quite small."

Nonetheless, Evelyn smiled, "it was home. I haven't had a home quite like it since."

Awkwardly, he followed her around the house as she showed him around. It wasn't much, but it was home, it made her feel young again, and when she was young, she was safe.

"Would you like to watch the sunset?" He spoke quickly, as though he wanted to leave.

She nodded at him, leading him down to the beach by the cabin. It wasn't very large, barely half a mile long, but it was still everything Evelyn needed. She sat herself down on the sun scorched grains with a yawn, leaning her head back onto the sand to watch the sun set from below.

She looked up at Tom who stood awkwardly beside her, "lay down, we're watching the sun set, aren't we?"

He shifted his weight between his feet momentarily before placing himself down beside her, rubbing the sand off his shoulder stiffly. "Now what?"

"Now nothing, we just watch the sun." She pointed up at the sky, "look how the colours blend together." It was art, like fresh colours on a canvas, all mixing together just for them as if the sun rays were destined to create this art.

Evelyn sat herself up, wiping the sand off her body, "look away," she said to Tom, watching as he sat up and closed his eyes. Evelyn reached her hand to her shoulder, slipping herself out

of her dress. She slipped off her shoes and smiled, making her way into the ocean before looking up. "Now I have the best view," she let herself sink into the chilly water, letting the weight of her body slip away from her. This was the bliss she had been searching for, the serenity she had been needing. And so, as she watched the palettes of tangerine, amber and rose collided, and forgot about the world around her.

She forgot about it all until she felt the waves begin to crash into her, unsteady her heart. Turning, she saw Tom entering the water, "look away," he mimicked her, and so she closed her eyes. She kept them closed until she felt his hand on her bare arm.

"Isn't it gorgeous?" She smiled up at the sun, now beginning to hide itself behind the horizon.

"I suppose it is." He had never really had a chance to just stop and admire the beauty of it.

"It's nice to just be able to breathe, to soak it all in," Evelyn beamed as she felt her heart ease into a slower rythmn, "everything around us has just stopped now."

Tom didn't reply, instead he mimicked Evelyns body position, letting himself sink into the water. She was right, he felt safe. Lost in the traunqil waters, it felt like his trips as a child, but without the looming threat of returning to the orphanage, here, he was in control.

He stood up, looking over at Evelyn and calling out her name, "Evelyn," he reached out his hands to her face, and without a second thought, he moved in. He let his lips crash into hers as though they were coarsing waves, rushing through the everlasting ocean.

One touch and the intoxication is instant. She took a deep breath in, the salty air mixed with his musk sending her into some kind of trance, weightless, she let herself fully bend to his will. His hands ran across her bare skin, sparking electricity inside of her and she let herself truly become his.

"What on earth was that?" Evelyn screeched as she entered his office the next morning.

"Good morning to you too!" He turned to face her with a sarcastic grin, "so kind of you to ask how I am doing this morning, my I am doing wonderfully..."

"Well..." she trailed off, waiting for an answer, "care to answer?"

He rolled his eyes, "according to my memory, we spent last night at the beach, as per your request might I remind you. We toured your small house, watched the sunset..."

"And after that?"

"I believe we had a splendid time, need I divulge more?" He turned back to his desk, returning to his work, letting his quill collide with the parchment on autopilot.

"Tom," he winced as she said his name and instantly, she felt wrong for saying it, "sorry." She rushed afterwards. "What is happening?"

"I could ask you the same question."

"How so? I am an open book," she retorted quickly.

He paused, thinking for a moment but keeping his head down, "you puzzle me."

"I could say the same for you. I don't know you, not really, yet here I am, living in your house-"

"Ah..." he cut her off, "it is not my house. It is the house of Abraxas and Lucius Malfoy; we are just guests."

"Well here I am, living in their house," she corrected herself, "but why am I even here? Why did you take me?"

"You know, for a Ravenclaw, you really lack the intelligence I suspected you would have," is all he replied.

"I am not a Ravenclaw anymore, that was Hogwarts, that was years ago! I don't even remember that" she whispered the last part quietly.

"Well, I am still a Slytherin." He finally looked up from his work, "do you not still possess the traits of a Ravenclaw? Have you lost your wit? Your intelligence? Your wisdom? " He kept pushing her, "has all of that really changed in those years apart? Have you really lost your personality?"

"I-I...." she stopped herself, "no I haven't."

"Perhaps it is simply time doing you no favours," he smirked at her as her face flushed.

"I could say the same for you," she looked at his unsaturated face, dotted with scars. "Time hasn't been exactly kind to you."

"Time has done nothing for me," he snapped, "time does not even think to touch me. Time fears me."

Evelyn brushed off his comments, "please answer me." She walked closer to his desk, swiping the parchment to the floor, "why am I here? Why can I not leave?"

"Do you even want to leave?"

"Answer me."

"You answer me first," his eyes locked onto hers, "do you want to leave?"

Her body moved without her thinking, her head shaking from side to side. "No," she sighed. She had nothing left to return to, she felt almost happier here, more purposeful.

"Good, because you will remain here," he reached down to scattered parchment on the floor, receiving a firm slap from Evelyn's hands before her picked it up.

"Why?"

He scoffed at her, "do you really want to know?"

"Yes, or I wouldn't be asking."

"I enjoy your company, it pleases me."

This time, Evelyn rolled her eyes, "that is not an answer."

"Not even if it is true?" He looked up at her, "how peculiar? Does that answer not provide you with enough satisfaction? Does it not please you as I do?"

"You do not please me."

"Last night would disagree, as would that other time." Evelyn's face flushed coral, but Tom remained unbothered. "Well, if you should truly want an answer," he looked at her as she nodded, "you know too much, even if you do not know that you know it. It would be dangerous to let you out of the Manor, you could be captured by forces that do not want me in power, and you would likely tell them everything."

"I wouldn't."

"No, you would," he said matter of factly, "whether knowingly or unknowingly, you would tell. There are many methods of torture that would loosen your tongue, you would break quickly."

"I-"

"You would," he cut her off, knowing what she was about to say, "you would break."

"Well, I appreciate your high expectations of me." She scoffed, clearly, he knew nothing of her. "Which forces even want you gone? Didn't you take care of the Ministry of Magic?"

"And how would you know that?" He stared at her blankly, that was not information he had shared with her.

Evelyn smiled, feeling like she had the upper hand, "I overheard someone talking about it a few days ago."

"Who was this?" He asked her through gritted teeth, "who is speaking carelessly around you?"

"I will not dignify that with an answer. You would hurt them, all for a mistake." And frankly, Evelyn did not know, she still found it hard to distinguish the voices of his followers, the only one she could identify was Astreas high pitched squeal.

"Anyway, you have a life of luxury here," he looked around at the office alone, the bookshelves stacked high, "the Malfoy Manor is more than large enough to accommodate your needs, there are several studies, hundreds of thousands of books, a potion room should you wish to indulge that little hobby again."

Evelyn raised her brows, "again?"

"Yes, you spent those few years after Hogwarts attempting to become a better Potioneer, did you not?"

She had indeed, "yes. But how would you know that?"

"I have my ways..." But she was not satisfied with that answer, "I had some of my followers' keeping tabs on you, I liked hearing of your oddly mundane life."

Somehow, she felt sort of honoured, while becoming the darkest wizard of all time, he had been checking in on her boring hobbies. "Anyway," his voice cut off her thoughts, "you have the house elves, my followers, everyone is at your beck and call."

"Not you," she stated, "not you at all."

"I am at no ones. Others exist to serve, I do not, I exist to lead."

"Lead me then." She looked into his eyes, taking the quill out of his hand, "lead me." Evelyn surrendered her hands into his, "lead me." Her hands reached down to his shirt, unbuttoning it slowly, "lead me."

He rolled his eyes, but as she made her way further down his shirt, he took her hands, kissing her neck and guiding them across his skin. He led her hands to her own shirt, lifting it over her head and revealing her bra. Evelyn let their hands move as one, across each other's bodies as she took her lips to his in a promise of realness, of the primal desire eating away at her.

"Evelyn," he breathed heavily, pushing her shoulders away, before looking her in the eye. "I only lead those who need to be led."

"I need to be led," she reached her hands back to his body, but he resisted.

"No, you do not," and with that, he left her alone in the office, topless and disappointed.

Evelyn spent the next few months bored. It didn't take too long for her to make her way through all of the interesting books in the many libraries, and soon she was left with nothing to do.

With nothing interesting to do, Evelyn turned to eavesdropping. After all, if she were to be living inside of the house, she wanted to know it well. Despite Tom doing his best to set up enchantments around the Manor, Evelyn found her way around them.

Every week, she listened in on their meetings, she listened for his progress, his downfalls, his tasks, she listened in on everything she could. After every meeting, she made a mental note of what had been discussed and listened out for it being mentioned around the Manor.

And in those few short months, she learnt more than she had working at the Ministry for years; whatever Tom had been doing, he had been hiding well. But in every meeting, the same phrase came up 'The Order', Evelyn assumed it was some kind of group, but that was all she could uncover from his meetings.

"Evelyn," she turned from her usual spot in the library to see Lucius Malfoy staring down at her. Without his father present, Evelyn had become much more able to enjoy his presence, Lucius had become some sort of ally for her. "She had the baby," the way he spoke suggested his news was no more than him purchasing a new coat, "we've named him Draco."

"After the constellation?" She asked him.

"No, it's the Latin for-"

Evelyn didn't let him finish, "for dragon." She paused, "ah sorry!" Ever since reading all those books, she had found herself brimming with knowledge, wanting to share it with anyone who could be interested. She wished to retrieve all the knowledge she once held all those years ago in Hogwarts, she wanted to remember what it was once like to be a Ravenclaw.

"Yes, anyway, your presence is requested downstairs."

Evelyn huffed, she had not had her presence requested since all those months ago, she had roamed free wherever she pleased. "Now?" When Lucius nodded, she raised her brows, "lead the way then..."

She followed him down through the maze of a Manor, a maze she had only just been able to navigate herself. Lucius took her to the hall of the Manor, pausing outside momentarily, "he would like you to enter."

Evelyn furrowed her brow, "okay." She watched as he pushed the door open, and her mouth fell. It was not just Tom she was meeting, it appeared she was meeting everyone. "What is this?" She asked quietly before she entered the room, she wasn't going in until she knew what was happening.

"I think it best I explain," she turned to see Tom stood in a dark cloak at the head of the table, "do enter."

And like a puppy following her trainer, she did. She made her way towards where he stood, too afraid to look at who else was in the room, "explain." She tried to be confident, but she had nothing, it came out like a quiver.

"Considering it seems you hear almost everything that happens in these meetings anyway," he trailed off, "I suppose it might make sense that you attend one," he pulled out a chair for her next to Lucius, "sit and say nothing." His last words were cold.

Evelyn took her seat and glanced at the people sat around the table, she recognised so few of them. It seemed that those who were granted a seat at his table was a rapidly changing group; there was no Sara, no Astrea, no Abraxas. Instead, there was a whole new host of recruits staring her down.

"Dolohov continue," he looked at the young man expectantly.

"Absolutely my Lord." Dolohov nodded at him, "along with Lestrangle, Malfoy, Rosier and Nott, we were able to kill the brothers. I believe the Order is now much smaller than it was before, but still, never any competition for you, my Lord." He bowed his head.

Evelyn felt Lucius beside her shuffle, "yes it was quite a task, I believe there may be far less members, but they appear to be gaining strength."

"How?" Tom shot back, "how could this be?"

"Well-"

"Not you Lestrangle."

Lucius spoke again, "I believe it is Albus' doing. He has recruited an Alastor Moody; we believe it is him who was able to capture Rosier."

"And why has nothing been done about this man?" Tom almost seemed bored, rather than angry, but Evelyn knew this could change in a second.

"He has been very elusive; Nott has been unable to track him down as of yet-"

A man, Evelyn assumed to be Nott cut in, "my Lord, I have made much progress. I believe him to be residing with another member of the Order, one Edgar Bones. I will make haste in identifying his location at once!" Nott seemed to shake as he spoke, speaking so quickly Evelyn feared he may combust.

"Adrian," upon hearing his first name, Nott quivered. "If you fail to locate this Edgar Bones by the end of the week, your wife will get a visit from Greyback. I am sure he would be pleased to know she has just given birth, would he not?"

"Absolutely my Lord, without fail my Lord." He gulped, "I will not fail you my Lo-"

"Enough." Tom said harshly, before turning to face another at the table, "Bella? How goes your task?"

"More protections have been set up my Lord. It is entirely impenetrable; I was thinking we could test the defences with a prisoner."

"Bella, we should not need to test them, if they require testing, they are not enough you foolish girl." He spat out at her, "I never thought you would disappoint me like this, it really is a shame," he reached into his pocket, clutching at his wand.

"No!" She called out at once, "my Lord of course! Of course I must add more, how foolish of me. It is not enough. Of course it is not." She spoke so rapidly Evelyn could barely understand her words.

"Perhaps I should have given the task to someone else, perhaps you are not capable..." His words made her shake her head rapidly.

"No no my Lord." She pleaded, "this is mine. I promise."

Tom sighed, "you have one more day Bella, do not fail me." He dropped his wand back into his pocket, "now, everyone leave us be," he turned to look at Evelyn once everyone had gone, "wasn't that much better than listening through the floorboards in the upstairs study?"

Evelyn felt herself flush, of course he knew. Nothing could happen in this house without him knowing. "Much better," she gulped, he seemed an entirely different person when he spoke to his followers. "Why do you treat them like that?"

"Like what?" But he didn't let her reply, "like followers? Evelyn, they exist to serve me, they follow me, they look to me for guidance, I am simply guiding them, and I do not wish to guide anyone who proves incompetent."

"Is that all they are to you? Are they just followers?" It was almost sad to see.

"What more would they be? I need nothing more than followers, I do not need the same companionship that some fools seek out, I thrive alone. I need followers, and I need..."

"Yes?"

"You," he said simply. "It is you."

"You need me, yet you need no companionship?" Evelyn stared at him blankly.

"Yes. I need you, but not as a companion, I need you as a partner. I want you by my side, why else do you think I invited you to my meeting?"

"Is that what this was? She raised her brows, "some kind of initiation?"

"No, you do not need initiating."

"Not this time at least?" She held a faint memory of herself in the Ravenclaw Dormitory, drenched in blood.

Tom shook his head, "that was entirely different, I had to know I trusted you then. I do not need to know that now."

"So you trust me?"

"Evelyn," he looked her in the eyes, "you have been entrusted with more information than most of my closest followers. You know things that could destroy me, my plans, my future, yet you keep them inside."

"Well, I haven't exactly been given the opportunity to share, have I?" She crossed her arms, "who could I really tell inside this Manor that doesn't already know?"

"But if you got that opportunity, I know that you wouldn't. You have too much of this humanity, too much of this self-righteousness," he replied to her, "you wouldn't betray me."

"Well, if am to be your partner of some kind," she began, "I need information. I need you to answer my questions, I need to know what is really happening."

He looked at her briefly before responding, "ask away." He mimicked her body's positioning, crossing his arms. "I am an open book."

"What do you really want?" As much as Evelyn had read about his aims, she wanted to hear it from him, she wanted to know what his true desires were.

"Evelyn, we witches and wizards have been given power, we have the power to do magic, the power to create or take away life. That gives us the right to rule over," he strained, "muggles. We have to take over for the greater good, muggles are failing to look after the world as it should be. Wizards always have been, and always will be better rulers. Our magical blood is powerful, it is special, and it should be treated as such. Those with such blood should be given the right to rule, and those without should follow."

Evelyn blinked rapidly, processing everything he had said. It was nothing like the fearful propaganda being spread, everything he had said, made sense to her. Wizards held more power than muggles, and it only made sense that those with the power, ruled those without.

"And what is the Order?"

"The Order," he began with a slight growl, "is the Order of the Phoenix, they are a society created by none other than our old Transfiguration teacher."

"Dumbledore."

He scowled at the name, "yes. The Order has been causing us challenges over the past months, they have been killing my Death Eaters." Evelyn felt uncomfortable hearing what he called his followers. "They attempt to stop me; they wish to halt my progress."

Evelyn almost asked why, she felt the words forming in her mouth, but it was a foolish question. There was no question as to why he should be stopped, but somehow after all her months in the Manor, Evelyn no longer felt a part of any side.

"They wish me to have no power, they wish to stop my uprising, but it was always coming. Many have tried before me, many have failed. Grindelwald was weak, that is why he was stopped, but I will not be. Together," he reached out his hand, "we will be unstoppable. You will stand alongside me, and the Order will be no problem for us."

Evelyn took his hand but hearing Grindelwald's name made a lump form in her throat. She shook her head, hoping it would shake away the doubt nipping away at her.

"There is nothing to fear," he squeezed her hand, "we will never die, we will never fail, we will never lose this power that we have now. Evelyn, we are unstoppable together." He softened his gaze into her eyes, "I need you by my side. I need you supporting me, I need you to be mine. You are an integral part of my life."

And those were all the words it took to shake away her doubt and melt her heart. Somehow, he always knew exactly what to say and exactly what to do. "Okay," she nodded her head, "I want to be your partner. I want to be yours." When Evelyn looked at his gaze, it was the closest she thought she had ever seen him to a smile, he had accomplished another goal of his, and this one seemed meaningful to him. "But I want to remember first." She felt the phial in her pocket, hoping he knew what she meant.

He stood up, pulling her to a stand alongside him and ignoring her final sentence. "How about we celebrate?"

"What did you have in mind?"

But before she had a chance to finish, she felt his tender lips collide with hers. Every kiss sent them further into a blissful oblivion; his hand tracing her back and he breathed in her sweet smell. Evelyn knotted her fists in his shirt, she wanted to be as close to him as possible, she wanted him. She let herself breathe in every aspect of him, his shaving cream, his shampoo, his everything, she wanted it all.

With a wave of his hand, the chairs that had once been so carefully set at the table flung to the corners, his other hand pushing Evelyn onto the outstretched table. As soon as she felt her body against the table, heat rose inside of her, travelling up to her chest with every raw

motion. She let her lips part again, every kiss, intense and hungry, washing over her like a wave of warmth, of comfort, of pleasure. His light stubble rubbed against her tender skin, but it didn't bother her, she was so happy.

Evelyn whimpered as she felt his hands roam all over her body, tracing her every curve before he pulled her closer, closer, closer.

When Evelyn awoke the next morning, it was bliss. She let herself sink into the bedsheets with a newfound happiness. It felt as though nothing could truly be wrong, somehow without knowing what she even wanted, she had gotten it all.

Rolling over, she felt the phial of her memories in her pocket, remembering what she had to do today. She knew her memories wouldn't change her mind, she wanted to be his partner, she wanted to stay alongside him, but she knew that remembering all their time together would give her a peace of mind. Even if not for her memories of him, she wanted to remember how he saw her, she wanted to remember her time at Hogwarts, she would never get a chance at that.

Evelyn remembered that the Pensieve was on the second floor, and so she made her way to the study. Somehow, despite spending weeks in the study reading, she had barely noticed it sat right there, almost begging her to use it, but now, stood with her phial poised, it was all she could think about.

Despite having never used a Pensieve, she remembered learning about it all those years ago at Hogwarts, she knew that somewhere deep within the castle walls, there was one just like the one in front of her. She reached out her hands, pulling out the basin from the ornate carved stone. From deep within the basin, a silvery glow beamed, swirling as though it were water, turning into some kind of cloud as it reached the top of the basin.

Evelyn reached into her pocket and pulled out the phial. It had been months since she placed it in her pocket, but she still remembered Tom's words. She knew that the answers she would find may not bring her comfort, but she still longed to know. It was as though a part of her was missing, and once she remembered everything, the puzzle would finally be complete.

She took the stopper off the phial, tilting her head as she saw the silvery wisps dance inside the phial, as though they knew it was their time, it was something that reminded her how much she loved magic. She adored how beautiful it all was, all of the colours, the sparkle, the

glow. No matter how peculiar the spell, the way it sounded, the motion of the wand, it was all artwork to her.

Evelyn took a deep breath, steadying herself as she began to lift the phial. But in that moment of calm, in her moment of steadiness, she heard something that instilled fear, she heard a scream downstairs.

With a sigh, she put the stopper back on her phial and dropped it into her pocket carelessly. And as she made her way out of the study, she heard the commotion growing, screams and shouts echoed across the Manor, the whip-like cracking sound of Apparition quickly following. She reached into her pocket, hoping for her wand, but it wasn't there. Ever since her duel with Astrea, she had been allowed her wand again, but being unable to leave the Manor, she had little need for it and therefore it remained where she slept, rather than in her pocket where she wished it was in that moment.

She gulped, tiptoeing to the edge of the staircase, peering down before she crept down to the landing. Wherever the commotion was, it was well contained, but alas, it was all she could hear. As she made her way through the maze of the Malfoy Manor, she felt it grow stronger, every step she took closer to the hall, the chaos growing in concentration.

Her dainty hands pressed against the wooden door, holding her breath as she attempted to listen in, but all she could hear was the whip of Apparition, and then silence. As soon as she heard the silence, she pressed gently on the door, peeking into the room, and what she saw made her heart freeze.

Bodies. Bodies everywhere. At least thirty bodies lay sprawled across the floor of the hall, each one clutching their wand tightly in one final plea, but Evelyn saw the futility. She made her way around the hall, feeling tears brim in her eyes. Most of them were people she did not know, voices she had perhaps overheard, or faces she had crossed paths with, but now they lay dead. No future waiting for them, no home to go to, no life to live. Nothing.

She crept forward towards a female body, and she dropped to the floor, clutching her heart. Moving a strand of midnight hair out of the way of the snowy face confirmed her fear; there in the heart of the Malfoy Manor lay the body of her old best friend.

"Oh Sara," she took her weak hand in hers, taking Sara's discarded wand with her other. It didn't matter to her that Sara seemed to resent her, what mattered is that once, perhaps a long time ago, they were the best of friends, and now they were no more than strangers. She

let her cold lips place a soft kiss on Sara's forehead before she rose to her feet again, wiping away her tears with her sleeve.

She moved deeper into the hall, making her way to the door on the other side with a deep breath, if anyone had failed to apparate out, it was the only place they could be. Wand raised, she stormed out of the door, jumping immediately once she saw the short haired girl stood with her wand raised at her.

"Drop it."

"Drop the wand!"

They both called at the same time.

Evelyn couldn't do what she wanted, Sara's wand felt as though it was glued to her palm, she felt as though she had to do this, she had to defend herself.

"*Stup-*"

But Evelyn was faster, "*Expelliarmus!*" She watched as the wand flew out of her hand. "Who are you? Who else is here? What do you want?" She felt the questions flow from her mouth without her knowing what she was saying.

"Frank!" The woman called out loudly, as though she had no fear.

"Who is Frank?" Evelyn was becoming more frantic, "who are you? Answer me!"

"Frank, I think it's her. Get him, get Albus!"

"Albus?" She stopped for a moment, her hand shaking as her wand felt as though it might drop, "Dumbledore?"

"Evelyn, how glad I am we found you."

Before she had a chance to react, she felt his hand on hers, heard the familiar whip-like crack of Apparition and felt her stomach turn. She fell to the floor, clutching her stomach, "let me go back, I have to go back," she shook her head, pulling away from Albus' firm grip.

"It's okay, you're safe here," the woman she had encountered in the Manor smiled at her, "he can't hurt you anymore."

"You're safe darling," the man, Frank, said to her.

"Alice, Frank," Albus turned to face them, "please leave us alone for a moment." He smiled as they walked out of the office before turning back to face Evelyn.

"Although I am pleased to see you again Evelyn, it is a shame of the circumstances, do you not agree?"

Evelyn said nothing.

"Now others may not be aware that you were in that Manor of your own free will Evelyn, but I think it will become apparent soon." He looked her up and down, "you will stay here, at Hogwarts and, it would be much appreciated if you could help us. You are no prisoner, but I would think twice about trying to leave, I fear some other members of the Order may not take a liking to you once they hear of your...shall we say willingness to remain at the Manor. Do I make myself clear?"

She nodded, it felt like when Tom had taken her from Hogwarts, she wasn't entirely trapped, but leaving would be so much worse for her. "I will stay here."

"I thought so," he reached out his hand, helping her to her feet, "although you are no prisoner, you will be confined to a spare sleeping quarters. It would be appreciated if you could surrender your wand," he motioned to the breaking wand in her hand.

"It isn't mine," she gulped, but handed it over nonetheless, flashes of Sara's body sprawled across the floor entering her mind. He had done that; he had killed her friend.

"Evelyn, you might not be aware, but we are in a war. It is kill or be killed, and now is not the time to be weak. I cannot make you help us; I cannot force you to join the correct side, I can only hope that you choose for yourself. And I would recommend making that choice sooner, rather than later. The sooner this war ends, the better for all of us." He glanced up at a picture sat on his desk, a picture in which most of those photographed were no longer with him. "Now, we shall discuss at a later date your time in the Manor, I hope the discussion should be pleasant, but I cannot force you to behave in any certain way. Before we move, is there

anything else I should know about for now?" He looked her up and down, "anything of urgency?"

She felt the phial in her pocket, taking a deep breath, "no, nothing." Evelyn knew that the Order wanted Tom dead, and perhaps her memories would be the key to that, but it wasn't something she was willing to risk. She would not share anything, she would wait, however long it took for someone to rescue her, someone to take her back to the Manor. She would wait until she was back where she belonged, she would not speak, she would not let them take him down.

"I shall escort you to your quarters and soon, we shall have to discuss everything about your time in the Manor, I should like to think it would be information you surrender, however, should you fail to do so, I believe some of the other members may have no qualm with a little bit of persuasion to loosen your tongue."

She gulped, she would not let someone hurt her, she simply wouldn't. Evelyn followed him up a large staircase and into the teachers' quarters. "Your room shall be locked at all times, we wouldn't want anyone getting in or out now, would we?" Albus shot her a wink, closing the door on her and making haste back to his office.

As soon as she heard the door shut, Evelyn fell to the ground. She clutched the phial with one hand, her thumb tracing silvery mist inside, her other hand resting on her stomach in an attempt to stop the post-Apparition nausea.

It took her several minutes to be able to compose herself, but she knew whatever the next few days or weeks or months held for her, would almost be worse than her time in the Manor. Dumbledore wanted to use her for her memories, he wanted to use her as a weapon, a weapon against someone she cared about, and it shattered her. Evelyn didn't betray people, not when they trusted her, and she wasn't about to change that for her old teacher.

Her teacher was no saint, the spoke of sides, of right and wrong. But he too was a killer, he too was responsible for death that could have been avoided. He might have eventually been the one to take down Gellert Grindelwald, but Evelyn had not forgotten which side he had first been on.

She was not some pawn he could use; she was not some weapon he could bring out when he was losing the war, she would not fold for him, she would not sacrifice who she was. She would share nothing.

Evelyn held onto her phial of memories, "he can't have you," she whispered, rising to her feet. She would have to hide them, given she had never had the chance to view them herself, no matter what was done to her, there was little she could offer that would help the Order. She knew it would be wisest to dispose to them, to pour the silvery liquid away, to crush the glass at once, but it was still a part of her. When she eventually got out, she would view them once and for all.

Reaching down to the floor, she lifted a loose floorboard under the bed, sliding the phial into a place it would not be found for years.

Evelyn did not see another person for two months. Trapped inside the four cobbled walls was where she remained, as though discarded like a broken toy. She was unsure if this was some kind of tactic, some kind of way to break her apart, but she refused to break. She knew he was coming for her; she knew he would be out there, searching night and day.

Evelyn let herself sink into the bed with a sigh, she had to get out.

"Evelyn,"

She jumped, squealing as she heard the door swing open to reveal Albus Dumbledore stood alone. "Come with me to my office, I think we ought to have a conversation."

"You left me here." She growled, "did you forget about me?"

"I did not, but it appears that perhaps someone else has..." He trailed off, leading the way out of the teachers' quarters, Evelyn following slowly behind him. She felt heavy, she felt tired, she felt as though she was dying.

As soon as she entered the office, she paused, it appeared this would not be a conversation they had alone. "Who are they?"

"Apologies Evelyn, this is the Order of the Phoenix, I assume Tom told you all about us," he seemed content using Tom's name, as though he was any other. "I asked a few members to attend, I thought the information you share will be useful for us all to hear." He turned to face the small group, "this is Sirius, Alastor and Remus." Evelyn stared at them, expressionless. "Do take a seat, especially in your condition," he looked at her frail figure, beckoning her to the chair before his desk.

Hesitantly, she made her way over.

"Now, I would like to hear from you. I would like you to tell me," he looked at Sirius, Alastor and Remus behind him, "I would like you to tell us everything."

She said nothing.

"How about we begin with how you got to the Manor? Were you taken? When?" He pressed her, "Evelyn, I assure you it is in your best interests to share."

"I was here..." she muttered softly.

"Pardon?"

"I was here. I came back, to take you up on your foolish offer. I thought I needed your protection," she almost laughed, it had been so long ago. "He was here too," she stopped herself before she said too much.

"When was he here?" Remus' eyes widened.

"He was in this castle?"

"I believe Evelyn is referring to many moons ago. He approached me for a job you see, for the position of Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher." Albus shook his head, "of course I turned him away. But it appears during that time, he must have bumped into Evelyn, and taken her with him."

"So you see, I didn't follow him like you seem to think. I did not chase after him, I did not search for him." She knew he thought the worst of her, even if he did not say so.

"But he took you back, where? To the Manor?" Sirius cut in, "has the Malfoy Manor always been his headquarters?"

"He took me somewhere." She paused, looking up at Sirius, "you look familiar."

"Is that an accusation?" Remus huffed, "this woman is a liar Albus, she is insinuating Sirius is somehow involved with that."

"I am not!" But hearing his name made something click, she closed her eyes, picturing her first few months in the Manor. Her conversations with Tom, her time in the room, her conversations with Regulus. "Regulus Black," she said simply, watching as Sirius' eyes seemed to flutter.

"You saw him?"

"Sirius do not listen!"

But Sirius kept pressing her, ignoring Remus, "tell me. Is the boy alive?"

She did not truly know the answer, but given that she had not seen him, she shook her head. "No."

"Sirius-"

"Remus, that's enough." Alastor cut in, his firm voice echoing across the office before turning to face Sirius, "we shall see Kreacher later if we can, if Kreacher fails to respond to you, Regulus is alive." He patted Sirius on the shoulder.

"I agree with Alastor, you have no reason to trust Evelyn."

"I didn't have to say anything, anything at all! If you do not trust me, then why even ask me questions, why not just kill me?" Evelyn shouted, anger filling her to the brim.

"We are not killers," Remus stepped forward, "we do not stoop to his level."

"Tell that to the families of those dead in the Malfoy Manor!"

"Evelyn," Albus joined in, "need I remind you we are in a War. If anyone threatens the lives of the Order, we fight back. We do not start the fights, we do not use Unforgiveables as the Ministry has been doing, we simply deflect the casters spell."

"They are still dead." Had the Order not come to the Malfoy Manor, they would all still be alive. In Evelyn's mind, that made them as good as guilty.

"We cannot trust what the girl is saying...."

"But" Sirius cut in, "we could trust what she has seen. Albus," he turned, as though asking for permission.

"Alastor, would you be up to the task?" Albus turned to face the scarred man, who limped over to Evelyn, nodding.

"I fear that there may be protection, some kind of enchantments, we may not get everything we need at once," Albus nodded again and Alastor stared deep into Evelyn's eyes, *"Legilimens."*

He entered Evelyn's mind with one swift movement. At first, it was just flashes, blurred faces, masks, darkness. Hundreds of images were playing in her mind at once, she was trying to shield, to keep him out.

But Alastor was more powerful, he took a deep breath, before going in again. This time, the flashes lasted longer, seconds of scenes played through her mind on repeat. Like lightning striking, they hit him with force, until one finally struck right through him.

He pulled away, his eyes wide, "Albus." He gulped, turning to face his bearded face, "is it true?"

"I believe so Alastor. I believe we have our weapon." He smiled, turning to look directly at Evelyn's stomach.

Evelyn's mouth fell open, her hand clutching her stomach.

"I need to step out," Remus left the room, Sirius following close behind him.

"Now what?" What would they do with her? Her child? Was she even safe anymore? "what happens with me?"

Alastor looked at Albus, speaking first, "I think we use it. I think it should serve as enough motivation for you to speak."

"Alastor-" Albus stopped him, "we are not monsters."

"Need I remind you this is a war? Need I remind you of Marlene McKinnon, Edgar Bones, Benjy Fenwick, the Bones family? All of them gave their lives for the war, I think anything is fair in a war."

"Not quite anything." Albus paused, "I think- I think we ought to confirm our suspicions. Bring a Healer when you next visit St Mungo's. If we are to do this correctly, it ought to be healthy before we do anything."

"Not a motivation if it isn't real."

Remus re-entered the room, "I think we let it grow. I think," he looked at Evelyn's whimpering face, "I think the girl will tell us all we need to know, in exchange for the child's safety."

"Albus," Sirius entered behind Remus, "you can arrange that?"

"You would keep it safe?" Evelyn felt her beady eyes brim with tears, she wanted to see her baby, she didn't want it to die. "You promise?"

Albus paused before he spoke, "I would, in exchange for information."

She didn't need to think, "I'll do it once I know this isn't some plan to break me. Show me the child, show me the proof, and I will share what I know."

"Alastor, I think you ought to find us a Healer then."

And so he did. But when he finally returned with a Healer months later, it was barely needed. Evelyn's belly was rotund, pale and purple. She was certainly pregnant.

"Albus, do give us some privacy," the Healer squeaked in a petite voice.

He turned around, facing away from Evelyn, "I am afraid this is all I can give, Madame Truckle."

Evelyn gulped, so much for not being a prisoner. Ever since that day, her every move had been watched. Members of the Order took turns watching her, watching her eat, watching her sleep, watching her simply be. She was on some kind of watch, unable to be left alone at any point.

"I have with me some of the newer muggle technology, I do apologise if it takes a tad longer than usual," she smiled at Evelyn, reaching into her bag and pulling out a small, thick wand. "This is a foetal stethoscope, it will help us check babies' heartbeat, may I?" She gestured for Evelyn to lift up her shirt.

Evelyn looked down at her belly, lifting her shirt awkwardly over it, "I haven't felt it move." She tried not to worry, but this baby was her safety net, it made sure she wasn't killed, they couldn't dispose of her if she held their so-called weapon.

"Not to worry sweet," Madame Truckle, placed the cold stethoscope on Evelyn's belly, sending shivers down her spine, "now if everyone could remain quiet." She closed her eyes, listening intently for a moment, then another, then another painstakingly long second.

"Well?" Evelyn moved, pulling her shirt back down, "please tell me." She closed her eyes, taking a breath, "is it okay?"

"Sounds perfectly healthy dear," she turned to face Albus, "you can turn back now."

"Is that all?" Albus asked impatiently, turning to face them again.

"Yes," she said hurriedly, sensing his frustration, "I would like to return every few weeks, if that is alright?"

Evelyn nodded intensely, she needed this. "Please."

"That sounds ideal," he nodded at her, "please follow Sirius out of the castle, he's just outside."

Madame Truckle smiled at Evelyn, squeezing her hand lightly before making her way out of the room, leaving the pair alone.

"Now, you must uphold your end of the bargain Evelyn. We will keep the child safe, should you provide information." He sat awkwardly at the end of her bed, "is that still something you agree to?"

"Just to you," she said quietly, "just to you. Only you know him like I do, I will only tell you."

He nodded, "shall we begin?"

"Yes."

"What happened when you arrived at the Manor?" He tilted his head at her, "where did he keep you? Where did you go?"

She took a breath before crafting her answer. "I was in a bedroom upstairs for the most part, it was a lot like this. It was small, it was cold, and it became my home. I stayed there for a long time. I also read a lot, like now," she gestured to the books sprawled messily across the floor. "Regulus got me books, he had some kind of library, he had a house elf too. He got me new books most days," she searched for more information in her mind, "I read more books than I ever have before. I read *Lord of the Flies*, *1984* and *The Great Gatsby*. I read all sorts of muggle books. I did this for weeks on end."

"Could you leave? Did Tom visit you?"

"No." She answered both his questions with one word, shaking her head.

"Why not?" Albus questioned, "were you locked in? Did you ask to leave? Why did he want you there?"

"You ought to ask him that, I am not a mind reader."

"Why were you there? Why then? Why did he not take you before?"

"Again, you ought to ask him," she reached her arms out in a yawn, "may we continue this another day?"

"Tomorrow." He said sharply, "as soon as you wake."

As soon as he left, Evelyn smiled. She had kept him occupied, she had answered his questions, and she knew her baby was safe.

And so, for the next visits, Evelyn drip fed him information. She would include the truth, at least a skeleton of it, but she would embellish it, she would share more than he needed to hear. She would fill his head with useless information, she would tell him the title of every book she had read, the decorations in the Malfoy Manor, information on Death Eaters she

knew were dead. She would overwhelm him every time he entered the room, leaving just enough of a crumb of real information, that he would come crawling back for more.

Evelyn gave him information whenever he asked, but she only did so in exchange for a visit with the Healer. And by the time she was ready to pop, she had barely scratched the surface of her time at the Malfoy Manor.

Albus knew nothing of Little Hangleton, he knew nothing of Orion Black, of the phial of her memories. He knew nothing of importance.

Instead, she drowned him with the details. She spent days talking about her duel with Astrea, she detailed the title of all the books she had read, the meals she had eaten, the layout of the Malfoy Manor. And when he appeared as though he was regretting his promise of safety, she would throw him a rope, she would give him the tiniest sliver of information.

She would do what she had to do to keep herself alive in this war.

Inside the Headmasters Office, Albus Dumbledore paced, "it's not enough Albus, you know it isn't," spoke the familiar voice of Remus Lupin.

"You're quite right, but perhaps she know nothing more."

"You cannot surely believe that!" Remus shook his head, exasperated. "She stayed with him for years, she is carrying his child."

"Remus, you did not know Tom like I did." Remus shuddered hearing his muggle name, "he was no ordinary boy. His closest of peers barely scratched the surface of his plan, I believe perhaps, he is the only one who truly knows everything."

Remus ejected, "but surely she must know more! She is hiding something; I can sense it Albus."

"That, she is." He simply nodded, continuing to pace around the office.

"Surely we ought to do something. Alastor would be more than willing to use Legilimency again, then we would have everything? Albus this war cannot continue!"

"Alastor will do no such thing. The woman is pregnant, we cannot harm her or the child. It may be just what we need to defeat him, once the child is born, we will seek more information from her, should she fail to produce enough of use...." He trailed off, there was little he could truly do. Both Evelyn and the child would be weapons, he needed them both alive if he were to use them against Tom.

"We cannot harm the child, but he will harm Harry if we do not stop him!" Remus pleaded, "we must save him!"

"Remus, we shall, but we are not him, we are not as he is. And I do not believe that Evelyn knows any more than we do regarding the prophecy.

"Albus, what do we do?" Remus' voice was quiet, "what do we do if she fails, what do we do if the child does not make it, if she does not make it?"

"All of those are what if's, Remus, for now, we hold onto that hope. In a war, hope is of such rarity, and right now, we are blessed with it. We should hold that hope close to us, for we may not get another chance like this. We will hold hope for Harry, for Neville. We shall do our best to protect them." He stopped pacing, "we cannot give up before we have even tried." Albus looked Remus in the eye, "Remus call the Order, we ought to meet, we ought to create a plan for when the child arrives. I fear it shall be soon and I do not wish to decide this alone."

"Absolutely." Remus nodded, and in a few moments, his office was filled with a scattered collection of members.

"As you are all aware," he began, taking a seat at his desk, "Evelyn will give birth any day now. Now I made a promise to her, that the child would be cared for, that the child would be protected, and I intend to uphold that promise."

Alastor Moody spoke next, "when the child is born, we must keep it safe. We are not sure when, but the child will be a weakness, of both Evelyn and You-Know-Who. In order for a weapon to be effective, it must be kept in pristine condition. Albus," he paused, nodding his head at the headmaster, "I know of someone who may be able to take the child, who would keep it safe. The Brocklehurst family, they had just had a child of their own, they would be able to pass them off as siblings if required?"

"We intent to raise his child. What if it turns out like him?" Sirius spat, "we can't do this Albus, it is foolish! We should be turning our efforts to protect those we love, what about Harry?"

"Harry is well protected, I assure you Sirius." Alastor nodded at him, "I set up the enchantments myself."

"Sirius, what happened to Tom was a rarity. His creation was under a love potion, I can only assume this child was not. He had no parents; this child would have two loving parents. Should this child veer towards the same darkness of their father, we can steer them back on the right path. After all, the same could be said about many families Sirius, yours included." He nodded his head at the man, "we cannot judge others for their family, something which they cannot control."

"So the child shall go to the Brocklehurst's?" Alice asked quietly, "but what shall we do with Evelyn? Do you really believe she would let us take away her child? She shivered, shaking her head at the thought.

"I do not believe she will have a choice, Alice." Albus shook his head weakly, "she would be weak, she has no wand, she could not fight us if she wanted to."

"And what of Evelyn?" Remus spoke up, "once the child is safe, she will have no reason to share information?"

"She doesn't have to want to," Sirius said, "it is a war, we do what we have to do."

Nobody spoke, but deep down, they were all glad someone had said it. If Evelyn was the key to winning this war, then their actions would be justified, everything that they did would be for the greater good.

"Speaking of Evelyn," Alice said, "I ought to go and swap shifts." She made her way out of the office, towards Evelyn's quarters. She knocked twice, "time to swap shifts Peter!" She paused, "Peter?" Alice dropped her wand into her palm, readying herself before she pushed the door open, "Peter?" But Peter was not there, the only one in the room was Evelyn, sat in a crimson puddle of blood.

"Help," she choked before she let her eyelids fall shut.

She was floating. Hanging from gossamer threads, levitating above the world and watching it all pass by without her. She was gone, outside of the world, simply watching the time tick by, watching the sun beat down a heavenly glow onto her.

She sat on the clouds, letting herself sink into them, letting the clouds wrap themselves around her body, caressing her softly. She was safe, she was safe in her cocoon. Nobody could hurt her there. Nobody could use her, she wasn't a weapon anymore, she was just herself.

She could see her protruding belly move, the sun shining from behind it. Inside of her was an angel, a gift from God himself. She was carrying the heavens inside of her, the weight of them crushing her shoulders, trying to push her back to the earth, but she was strong. She was carrying a life, a life that not even the heavens could try to stop. It was as though a star had grown from within her.

*"Evelyn."*

It was her mother's voice, echoing across the skies. It was just as sweet as she had remembered, the same voice that had sung her to sleep all those years ago, like a dip of sherbet to a child. It made her melt.

*"Evelyn, you have done so well. You have come so far."*

Her father spoke next, *"we are so proud of you."*

She longed for them, she longed for their touch, she wished to have them take her in an embrace, to reassure her, to remind her everything was alright. She longed for them to meet their grandchild, to hold them like she too had been held.

*"You can't leave, not yet baby."* Her mother's voice was gentle, like a lullaby to send her to sleep. *"Your daughter needs you."*

Evelyn smiled, her eyes beginning to close, "I have a daughter." She glanced through her half open eyes at her belly, letting her hands sink deeper into the clouds.

*"You have to go back to her now baby. She needs you; you can't leave her just yet. Be strong for me," her mother hushed her, "let yourself sleep, sink into the clouds, let them carry you as you have carried her."*

And so she did, she let her body melt into the cloud, she let the cloud envelop her and take her away, away to meet her star.

Evelyn let her eyelids fall shut, and when they opened, there was blood everywhere. She looked down at her stomach, gulping once she saw the bloody slice across it, the blood trickling down her sides as her body sunk into the warmth.

"Where's my baby?" She felt like she was still dreaming, she could see all of the blood, but she felt nothing. She was still floating, she was still in the clouds, she was weightless.

"Lay back," she heard the quiet voice of Madame Truckle, a hand pushing her shoulder deeper into the bed.

"I need my baby. Please," the sweat beads on her forehead trickled down to her quivering lip, "I can't hear her, where is she?"

"Evelyn," it was Albus, she could barely make out his face, but she recognised his voice, "you need to prepare yourself."

"I had a baby, let me see her," her words were barely coherent, "give me my baby."

Albus nodded at Madame Truckle, beckoning her to bring over the child. "She is," he paused, searching for the right word, "damaged."

But Evelyn didn't care, everything around her was a blur, all she needed was her child. She had carried her for nine months, whatever she looked like, she was perfect. "Please," she reached out her arms weakly, her heart slowing immediately as she felt the weight placed on her chest. "Hello," she cooed weakly, and the world around her faded away. She was with her baby now, she had all she needed in her arms.

"Evelyn, her f-"

Madame Truckle cut him off, "Albus, not now!"

Evelyn was smiling anyway. It didn't matter to her. She traced the scar across her face, following it as it faded down her left arm. "She's perfect," she put her finger into her petite hand, smiling as she grasped it. "My little star." She was at peace. The heavens had brought her a star.

"Will she be safe? You promise?" She asked as she let her fingers trace the greying scar again, "you will let no harm come to her?"

"She will be safe," Albus took a step closer to her, "but we must go. We must take her Evelyn; she must go somewhere safe now."

"She is my baby, you can't take her," but Evelyn knew she could put up no fight, she could barely even feel her own child against her chest, let alone the gaping wound in her belly. "Please, let me stay with her."

Madame Truckle shifted her weight between her feet, "Albus, I fear-"

"She knows," he nodded at Evelyn lightly, "she knows."

Evelyn nodded back, "let me name her at least. Let me name her before we go."

Albus nodded in agreement, "but we must go quickly."

"It is okay, I already have a name," she closed her eyes for a moment, "you see," she opened her eyes, letting her cold hand trace her daughters' scars, "she is filled with magic. Her scar is no more than it trying to escape. She is a star; she simply wishes to return home as I do. She is Estella."

Her hand fell to her side as Albus swooped up Estella in her arms.

"Take care of her," the words barely escaped her lips.

And then, knowing it was safe, she let herself go, she let herself go back to the clouds, to the sky, to the place she would always be with her star.