

## Salt Water

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# Salt Water

by [TheOnceandFutureQueenofTarts](#)

## Summary

Tom accidentally calls a selkie to him as a child. Luckily, being ruthless and possessive has never been a challenge for him.

A romance told in seven-year increments.

## Notes

Attempting a multi-chaptered thing that isn't completely for the lulz. This will likely have four or five chapters, but don't quote me on that.

Enjoy!

# I (4)

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

It was Tom's first trip to the seaside, finally old enough to join the group from Wool's that took the train out each summer.

He was instantly entranced by the ocean. The power, the majesty, the violence – one day, he would evoke those feelings in others with his mere presence. No one would be able to hurt him or ignore him then.

He found a small section of beach away from the other children, separated by large rocks, where he could let himself stare at the roiling water without the others watching him.

A shove from behind sent him sprawling into the shallows.

“Ay, Riddle,” a boy jeered from above him, face silhouetted by the dim sunlight. “Think we can soak the freak out of you?”

Tom fought like a child possessed, biting, kicking, and scratching at his assailants, but as the two were older and larger, he was fighting a losing battle. One of them, a gangly, pasty-faced nine-year old named Jacob, had his legs pinned down while seven-year old Billy Stubbs planted a knee on Tom's chest and forced his head under the water with a firm grip on Tom's throat.

Unfortunately, it looked like it might be his last trip to the sea, too.

Panicking, Tom inhaled a lungful of sea water, his eyes burning as they remained open, glaring hatefully up at the boy. Tom may not have noticed the bitter tears blending into the salt water around him, but the ocean certainly did.

*One.*

Digging his nails into the arm holding his head down, Tom pushed with all his waning strength. It didn't budge.

*Two.*

He *refused* to die like this, drowned like a rat – like a nobody. But.

*Three.*

His power.

*Four. Five.*

It wasn't obeying him.

*Six.*

*Please—*

*Seven.*

On the cusp of unconsciousness, it took Tom a moment to realize the weight on his chest and limbs was suddenly removed. He broke through the surface and immediately began hacking the sea water out of his lungs, nose and eyes running. Everything hurt, especially breathing, and his head felt packed with cotton wool.

Looking to see where Jacob and Billy had gone, Tom noticed them scrambling back from the water's edge. A rock launched from behind Tom at the boys had him spinning around too fast and losing his balance, toppling back under the surf.

"No, no, c'mon, kiddo, stay with me," a voice said as Tom was dragged up the rocky beach.

"Yeah, run away, ye great cowards!" the voice shouted angrily and moved away, eliciting screams from the boys who'd been attempting to drown Tom. He rolled onto his side and tried to regain his breath.

He heard his rescuer return but couldn't convince his muscles to move and get away. A hand pounded against Tom's back, helping jolt the remaining water out of him.

"There ye go, you'll be alright."

Tom turned his head to see who he was indebted to and met the most intensely green eyes he'd ever seen. He stared for a few moments before moving on. Wet, shaggy black hair that looked like it would be a mess even dry, light brown skin, and a complete lack of clothes that had Tom's eyes shooting skyward and him scrabbling back a few feet.

Looking down, the strange man seemed to finally notice he was naked.

"Haaa... Shite," the man grumbled, face and ears turning red. "Sorry about that."

Then, with a wave of his hand, a pair of loose trousers appeared, which he thankfully put on.

Wait.

"How did you do that?" Tom demanded. "*Tell the truth!*"

The strange man's verdant eyes widened as he let out a bright laugh. "Oh! You're a wizard!"

"...I'm a what?" Tom asked blankly.

"A wizard! You can do magic – you just tried to compel me," the man explained. "Bad form, that."

Tom grew sullen upon realizing he'd failed. "So there are others who can do magic?"

*I'm not special?*

“Aye, there’s a whole world of magic hidden away. But that’s impressive – you have excellent control for being such a wee one.”

Choosing to ignore the ‘wee’ comment, Tom preened under the praise. Special after all.

“And you can do magic?”

“I can,” the man confirmed. “I used to be a wizard like yourself, believe it or not. Harry Potter, at your service.”

“Tom Riddle,” he said with a nod. “Used to be?”

“Yep, many years ago. Now I’m a selkie – a seal-person, of sorts.”

Tom stared. “You’re not human anymore? How did that happen? Was it magic? How long ago?”

“Ah, well...” Harry rubbed the back of his neck, looking a little overwhelmed. “It’s a long story, and not likely to interest you.”

*Lie.*

As always, Tom wasn’t sure how he knew, but something told him Harry had just lied and he was damn sure going to call him on it. “Why are you lying? Why won’t you tell me?”

“Lord, you’re a sharp one, aren’t you?” Harry huffed a laugh. “Sorry, sprog. It’s a tale for a different day.”

Tom perked up a bit. That implied there would be other days. “Can I stay with you? I want to learn more about magic.”

“Unfortunately, no,” Harry said, looking apologetic. “I live in the sea, which is no place for a human boy.”

He fumed at being denied, but Tom’s need for knowledge beat out even his anger. “But, you’re human now. Can’t you just stay that way? Are you like the werewolves in stories, where you transform on the full moon?”

“Something like that,” the selkie hedged.

Tom glared. “Explain.”

“Ahhh, fine,” Harry sighed, eyes distant. “It takes a selfish person to keep a selkie, or a selfless person to love one. We can only come ashore once every seven years, y’see – unless someone hides our skin from us.”

“So if I find and hide your skin, you have to stay with me?” Tom asked, already plotting.

“That’s right, yeah,” Harry nodded. “But a selkie always wants to go back to the sea; even if we’re otherwise happy on land, we’ll keep looking for our skin and leave as soon as we find it.”

He locked eyes with Tom, expression serious. “Could you hide my skin well enough that I’d never find it? And no one else would either?”

Tom shifted uncomfortably. Personal space in the orphanage was nonexistent, and he still had to share his room with three other boys (he was working on changing that). And the idea of having to share Harry with anyone who took his skin was intolerable. “...No.”

Harry nodded again, seeming to expect this. “Well then. Perhaps in seven years?”

He grinned, but it dimmed when Tom’s frown remained. “Will you come back here again?”

“Yes, Wool’s comes here once a year,” he said warily.

“Well then I’ll see you next year, yeah? Just because I can’t be human again for seven years doesn’t mean I won’t visit you if you call.”

He shrugged. “I’ll just be a seal, s’all.”

“You... you promise? You won’t forget?” Tom demanded.

Harry laughed and ruffled Tom’s hair, despite the boy’s incensed squawk. “Ahh Tom, how could I ever forget you? My little wizard.”

And Tom didn’t protest as the selkie held him close, his chest warming.

The two sat together for the remainder of Tom’s time at the seaside, talking about magic and staring out at the rolling waves.

## Chapter End Notes

Next up: Tom at eleven.

## II (11)

### Chapter Summary

Tom and Harry talk about Hogwarts (kind of).

### Chapter Notes

This chapter fought me, but I wanted to get it posted before I overthought it. The next two chapters are mostly written, so they should be posted more promptly.

Also: [this is Harry as a seal](#); he's a harbour seal, so just imagine him constantly [banana-ing](#) when Tom gets too serious.

Enjoy?

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tom summoned Harry from the waves with his tears every year he went to the seaside with Wool's. While the seal wasn't nearly as engaging to speak with as the man had been, it was a balm to Tom's loneliness, which he often denied or ignored, to talk to someone who didn't fear or hate him as a baseline.

Tom was considered by many to be a quiet boy, if only because there was no one he considered worth the effort of conversation. But with Harry, he'd speak himself hoarse, relating anything of interest in the past year and showing all the new ways in which he'd mastered his wandless magic.

So, it was easy for Harry to see that Tom was greatly out of sorts on his next visit as a human. And knowing Tom's age...

"Oh, Tom. Did ye not get a letter?" Harry asked gently.

"I received my Hogwarts letter, yes," Tom said sullenly, tossing a pebble out into the waves. "Along with a visitor."

"A visitor? Did one of the professors come to see you and explain about magic?"

"He certainly explained some things," Tom muttered. "Professor Dumbledore—"

"Dumbledore?" Harry interrupted. "Albus Dumbledore? Blue eyes, red hair, bit of a git?"

“That’s putting it mildly, but yes,” Tom groused. “He heard Mrs. Cole’s tales about me, the devil child and source of all misfortune in that bloody orphanage. Apparently he didn’t care for my side of things.”

“That doesn’t shock me all that much,” Harry muttered, running a hand through his wild hair in frustration. “Perhaps you’d better tell me everything.”

So the boy related how Dumbledore’s visit had gone from bad to worse, including Tom’s less-than-wise comments about controlling animals and hurting others—

“Really, Tom?” Harry sighed exasperatedly as Tom flushed in embarrassment.

—Dumbledore’s demonstration of magic—

“*Albus* ...” Harry gritted out, pinching the bridge of his nose.

—to Tom’s concerns about how Dumbledore knew about his purloined prizes.

“He did Legilimency on an eleven-year old?!” Harry nearly exploded.

“What’s Legilimency?” Tom demanded.

“It’s, uh... In simplified terms, it’s using magic to read someone’s mind, kind of,” Harry said, running a hand through his hair agitatedly. “I was never very good at the Mind Arts, so I can’t really tell you more about how it works, but it’s frowned upon when used outside of specific settings, and especially against a minor.”

Well. Tom had his first project for when he arrived at Hogwarts – read up on the Mind Arts and learn all he could about Legilimency. Because he didn’t have enough on his plate, trying to learn about the magical world and catch up to his peers, now he had to worry about a nosy, vindictive person in a position of authority who could read his mind undetected. Grand.

He whipped another pebble into the water.

“Is there any way I can protect myself from Legilimency? Is it a common skill? Is it legal?” Tom launched into a barrage of questions, determined to learn as much as possible in his time with Harry.

“There’s Occlumency – clearing your mind to defend it – but I’m absolute pants at it. You might have better luck, though, considering your level of control.”

Tom puffed up a little bit with pride.

“But you’re naught but a child, you shouldn’t have to worry about these things,” the man frowned, turning to face the boy. “If Albus Dumbledore ever gives you any grief, you tell him that Harry Potter is very disappointed he’s taken to bullying children and he should be ashamed of himself.”

“How do you know him, anyway?” Tom asked, feeling more than a little jealous. Harry was *his*, dammit.



“One of the people who kept my skin years ago was a neighbour of Albus’, and related to one of his best friends,” Harry said. “Bathilda Bagshot, lovely woman, a magical historian. We had some great chats about how I’ve seen magic and perceptions change over the years.

“Albus was often at her house while Gellert was staying there. Thick as thieves, those two. At least, until they had their nasty falling-out,” Harry stared out at the horizon, caught in a memory.

“Have many people kept your skin?”

“A few,” Harry said, nodding absently. “Some kinder than others.”

Tom sensed he wouldn’t get the full story about that today, but he would pull the information from Harry eventually. Then he would go get vengeance on behalf of his selkie for any mistreatment he’d suffered.

Deciding to change tack, he asked about something else he’d noticed about his companion.

“How old are you? You don’t look any different than you did the last time I saw you,” Tom said. “Do you age? Can you live forever?”

Harry glanced at him in bemusement. “I’d forgotten how full of questions ye can be. I age, but quite slowly. It’s tricky to keep track of time in the water, especially when I don’t have a frequent visitor like yerself,” he winked. “As for living forever, I have no idea, but I hope not. That sounds lonely...”

Harry slipped off into his thoughts again, which just wouldn’t do.

“How old were you when you became a selkie? How did it happen?” Tom demanded.

“I was eleven. Or thereabouts – it was a long time ago,” Harry said, still half-lost in his mind. “My relatives were punishing me for some accidental magic, and I guess my magic must’ve thought my life was in danger. It just... took over. Next I knew, years had passed and I spent most of my time in the water.”

Tom had been tempted to interrupt, but given how hard it could be to get Harry to talk about himself, he exercised self-control. “How long ago?”

“Hmm... What year is it now?”

“It’s 1938.”

“Oh, gracious,” Harry laughed in surprise. “It’s been more than two-hundred and thirty years!”

Tom stared. He didn’t sense a lie, but it was still difficult to believe.

Just to rib Harry a bit, he said, “Christ, you’re bloody ancient, aren’t you?”

“Oi!”

The selkie chased him down and tousled his hair viciously, leaving Tom looking a bit like a bewildered porcupine.

“I stand corrected,” he said drily, patting his hair back into a semblance of order. Harry was lucky Tom liked him, or he’d have removed a finger for that. “Clearly you’re no more mature than you were two-hundred and thirty years ago.”

“Don’t you sass me, you impertinent little whippersnapper,” Harry cried in mock outrage before dissolving into giggles. A small smile appeared on Tom’s face.

“There we are,” Harry said, with the occasional hiccup from his laughter. “Feeling a bit better, then?”

“...I do,” Tom said hesitantly, as if just noticing he’d been dragged out of his black mood that had lingered since Dumbledore’s visit. Staring back at Harry, he nodded. “Thank you.”

As the day wound down and the time of Tom’s much-despised departure approached, Harry posed the question that was becoming a tradition of their visits.

“So, planning to steal my skin this time, my young Tom?” Harry asked, smiling.

“And if I were?” Tom replied, only half in jest.

“Well, I’d say you’d have your work cut out for you. Few know Hogwarts’ secrets as well as I do, so hiding it will be a task.

“Besides, you don’t need me pining for the waves and casting shadows over your time at Hogwarts. You’ll be ruling the roost just fine on your own, I expect,” Harry grinned, eyes warm.

While Tom knew he’d put himself at the top of the Hogwarts hierarchy eventually, no matter what he had to do, it made him glow with pride to know that Harry knew it, too.

“Maybe next time, then,” Tom said, giving a small grin in return.

## Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: Harry's tale, in part.

# Interlude: Harry (I)

## Chapter Summary

How Harry begins.

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Harry was born to James and Lily Potter on July 31, 1664, in Godric's Hollow. James, the local constable, and Lily, a healer, loved their son with everything they had, and were lucky enough to have a good group of friends to help with raising and caring for their child.

The first, but far from last, tragedy of young Harry's life came in October of 1665. What would become known as the Great Plague of London descended on Godric's Hollow, striking the Potter home in the form of a plague-infested rat. By the time the month was out, the entire village had been wiped out, save for Harry. When he was discovered by the medics from a nearby town searching for survivors, Harry became known as the Boy Who Lived by the surrounding regions.

Having no living grandparents or closer relatives, Harry was sent to live with his aunt and uncle in Surrey. Holding little affection and less respect for her deceased sister, Petunia Dursley felt no obligation to care for the burden that had been thrust upon her family. Instead, Harry became the household's servant. In exchange for the absolute bare minimum of food scraps, clothes, and roof over his head, Harry was expected to take on any and all work about the Dursley's modest property as soon as he physically could. Verbal lashings and neglect were used to correct any issues the Dursleys took with Harry and his "freakish" behaviour, and his cousin Dudley was keen to beat the lessons into him whenever he could.

So went Harry's life until shortly before his eleventh birthday.

Working in the garden, while exhausting, was one of Harry's favourite chores, as he got to be outside, feeling the breeze and sunshine while he worked. He had also made companions of the few garden snakes in the area, who somehow spoke English. Harry kept these conversations quiet and tried not to question it, since he didn't want to be tried as a witch and they were his sole companions.

It was a particularly warm, sunny day, and Harry had made excellent headway with his work, so he was enjoying a small break tucked amongst some of the taller plants and chatting with a particularly loquacious grass snake he called Gawain. So caught up was Harry that he failed to notice his cousin sneaking up to cause trouble. Dudley saw the snake and panicked and Harry, not understanding he hadn't made the switch from the snake language back to English, attempted to calm his cousin.

Dudley's high-pitched cries of alarm drew not only his parents, but also all their nearby neighbours, and soon Harry was decried as a witch. As the local magistrate was already present, the gathered folk demanded an ordeal by cold water in the nearby section of the Thames.

Before he could convince anyone of his innocence (or much of anything), Harry found himself tied up and tossed into the river like bait on a fishhook. Having never learned to swim and not being able to thrash, Harry quickly found himself sinking and drowning.

*His relatives would not drag him back up, this was too long, he was going to die.*

Harry found he wasn't as concerned about this as he probably should be. But something deep in his gut, that he was always aware of but tried to ignore to avoid his relatives' ire, seized him. He could feel his body changing, feel warmth extend from his core throughout him that quelled the chill and fear the water brought.

He was already darting downstream by the time Harry registered the warmth fading. The movement felt effortless, twisting around weirs and flash locks, evading the crush of the boats crowding London, and out to the North Sea.

And Harry Potter lost awareness of his former humanity for many years.

## Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: Tom during his Hogwarts years.

## II.5 (14)

The years after Tom first went to Hogwarts didn't allow for visits to the seaside and Harry. He returned to London in the midst of an IRA bombing campaign, which began to include train stations days after the Hogwarts Express pulled in to King's Cross. Wool's decided to halt all unnecessary activities outside the orphanage for the safety of its wards, which drained the few joys the children had. Even if he could've gone, Tom wasn't willing to risk it. He'd see Harry the following year.

And then, days after the Hogwarts Express returned Tom to his true home, the United Kingdom declared war on Germany. This existed at the periphery of Tom's attention during the school year – after all, he had classes to top, purebloods to dominate, and so much to learn; he couldn't be bothered to waste thought on a muggle conflict that would hopefully be over by the next summer.

It wasn't.

As the summer after second year progressed, air and sea attacks increased and Tom learned to fear what muggles were capable of. It didn't help that rationing had begun over the previous school year and no one had thought to get the proper paperwork for Tom. Portions were already so limited at Wool's that his typical intimidation tactics were less successful when pitted against wartime's gnawing hunger. He would have to wait yet another year before visiting the selkie.

Coming back after his third year to a bombed-out London, despite asking – nearly begging – to be allowed to stay at Hogwarts, was numbing. He didn't care about the muggles or the city, but seeing the geography of his childhood so entirely altered and not being able to escape it instilled a terror of mortality he found difficult to master. The Blitz appeared to be over, but the knowledge that one more bomb in the wrong place at the wrong time and Tom Riddle would be no more was a bit more than he could handle.

So, one day in July, he used some of the money he'd accumulated (stolen or gained through selling nicked things) and bought a ticket to the seaside town Wool's had frequented. He forcefully ignored the risks that came with rail travel or being near the North Sea – his Slytherin self-preservation seemed to short out when everything had risks.

Travelling to his typical, secluded section of beach, Tom found it easier than usual to draw forth the seven necessary tears. He sat down, drawing his legs up and resting his chin on his knees to wait.

Before many minutes had passed, a deep grey-speckled harbour seal emerged from the tide and came bounding up to Tom. He wrinkled his nose and pushed Harry's enthusiastic sniffing away from his face, but gave a small laugh when the selkie flopped about and patted him on the shin.

“Yes, yes, it's good to see you too, you ridiculous thing,” Tom murmured, patting Harry on the head in return. The selkie seemed to pick up on Tom's solemn mood and settled against

him, prompting Tom to stroke Harry's back.

The two sat in silence for hours, staring out across the water to the darkening horizon. As dusk descended, Tom began to haltingly relate how his first three years at Hogwarts had gone – his sorting into Slytherin and the bigotry he faced from the purebloods, establishing himself as the most intelligent and magically talented in his year (and several years above him), Dumbledore's continued - if subdued - wariness; the loneliness and fear and rage he felt, whether in the muggle or magical world, which he buried deep and hid from anyone other than the present company.

Harry's responses were limited to sympathetic grunts and a steady presence, but it was more than Tom had ever had from anyone else, and much more than he'd had for the past three years.

The two curled up together under a rocky outcrop for the night, wandless warming charm applied, and Tom forced his mind to compartmentalise and calm.

He could hate himself later for this weakness, but right now he desperately needed the comfort of knowing someone cared if he lived or died.

## III (18)

### Chapter Notes

I had a lot of conflicting thoughts about where I wanted this to go, but I've finally picked a path. This chapter is almost 2,200 words - well over half of the previous word count for the entire story, so hopefully that helps make up for the wait.

Thank you to everyone who has commented, kudosed, bookmarked and subscribed! It means a lot ♥

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The next time Harry came ashore as a human in response to Tom's call, he knew something was different. Off.

Wrong.

It was difficult to put his finger on what. He saw Tom so rarely, with such large stretches of time between visits from the boy – now on the cusp of adulthood. And his perceptions while a seal were hazy and indistinct, impressions rather than clear-cut actuality.

All the same, he knew Tom had been distressed during their last time together, and that was enough to be getting on with.

He practically tackled the boy as he left the ocean, running bodily into Tom and throwing his arms around him.

“Hello, Harry,” Tom said, voice muffled by the side of Harry's head. The evenness of his voice was belied by the tension in his arms around Harry.

“Welcome back, my wee wizard,” the selkie teased. He and Tom noticed at the same moment that, for the first time, Harry was the one looking up into Tom's eyes.

“Are you really in a position to be calling me–” Tom started, a gleam of unholy glee in his eyes.

“Not a word, ye bloody weed,” Harry warned. Tom laughed in response.

“I've missed ye,” he said.

“I've missed you, too,” Tom replied softly after a moment. “Very much.”

“Will you tell me what's bothering you?”

“What makes you think something’s bothering me?”

Harry gave him a look.

Tom sighed, eyes sliding out over the water. “Very well, if you insist.”

“I most definitely do,” Harry said, settling a few steps away to give Tom room to breathe.

Tom picked up a handful of stones from the beach, tossing them into the sea as he spoke.

“Two years ago, I discovered something rather important about my heritage. I am a descendant of Salazar Slytherin – a half-blooded one, rather than a mu--” he cut a quick glance at Harry and corrected himself. “--ggleborn.

“As you can imagine, this changed my life significantly, particularly my standing in Slytherin. I was nearing the top of the hierarchy already – I wouldn’t have permitted anything else – but suddenly I was the undisputed ruler of the house,” he said with pride and more than a little bitterness.

“It also meant finally having some information on how to find any remaining family. I found where the last of my mother’s relatives – her brother, my uncle –” the contempt in Tom’s tone was palpable. “Was living more than a year ago, but couldn’t bring myself to go immediately. I learned all I could about the Slytherin line and the Gaunts. What I learned wasn’t encouraging.”

He threw a stone hard. It fell further than the others, though with no more of a splash.

“Fallen out of favour and good standing due to inbreeding, insanity, and an unfortunate habit of producing squibs,” he said venomously. “Living in squalor, separated from the magical world, on the outskirts of a muggle village.”

Harry touched Tom’s shoulder gently. He exhaled deeply before collecting himself and continuing.

“I finally went there a few days ago. My uncle was barely coherent, but in amongst his hateful rambling he mistook me for someone else,” Tom paused. “My father.”

Harry’s sharp inhale made Tom grin grimly. “Tom Riddle. He lived in a grand house on a hill overlooking the town, with his parents. My grandparents. The wealthiest people in the area.

“They weren’t happy to see me. I didn’t stay long.”

Tom’s jaw tensed and his eyebrows did something complicated. He refused to look at Harry.

“All this time, I had a father. I had – family,” he swallowed around a lump in his throat and frowned, irritated by his weakness. “None of them wanted me.”

Harry put his hand on the back of Tom’s neck, pulling his face down to meet Harry’s eyes and rest forehead to forehead. “Sometimes family aren’t worth the blood you share. If they didn’t want you, that’s their loss.”



Tom stared at him, eyes flicking back and forth to take in Harry's expression. After a moment, he gave a small smile.

"Want me to curse their hair off?" Harry offered.

Tom's face went carefully blank. "Ah, no, thank you. That won't be necessary."

Harry squinted up at him. "Tom."

"Yes, Harry?"

"We both know ye're a vengeful little—"

"--not little," Tom interrupted, self-preservation deserting him in favour of correcting his perceived height.

"--*absolutely miniscule* sprog. What did ye do to those family members?"

Tom stared at him evenly. "I killed my father, grandmother and grandfather and framed my uncle."

Harry's gaze hardened. "Tom."

"Yes, Harry?" Tom replied, voice deadly quiet.

"Have ye killed anyone else I should know about?"

"No."

"...Don't do it again, please," Harry sighed, dragging a hand through his hair.

Tom replaced Harry's hand with his own, gently petting the selkie. "Yes, Harry."

They stood side-by-side, soaking in each others' presence.

Eventually, Tom broke the silence. "Will you give me your skin, Harry?"

"Ha! As if I'd make it that easy for ye," Harry shook off the sombre mood and grinned wanly. "Ye'll have to work for it."

Almost before Harry had finished talking, Tom had hit him with a quick *incarcerous*.

"Oi!"

Uttering a quiet *point-me* spell, Tom had Harry's skin in his hands before five minutes had passed. He walked back triumphantly to the irate selkie flopping on the beach, much like his seal-form would do.

"You were saying?" he said.

"That shouldn't have worked," Harry squawked, incensed. "Cheater!"

“No one likes a sore loser, Harry,” Tom replied smugly.

He pulled the bundle of rope and squirming selkie close before apparating back to his Knockturn apartment. Home, together at last.

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A small, sceptical part of Tom worried that living with Harry would ruin their connection – that the reality couldn’t possibly live up to fourteen years of hopes.

But it did.

They clicked in a way Tom never had with another person. He wondered if Harry was pretending to be what Tom wanted, but they got on each others’ nerves and had their domestic conflicts, much like he imagined any pair of people would (especially if one of those people got water all over the floor after a bath, *Harry* ). The deep, unhampered loathing that Tom often felt for others was wonderfully absent, though.

He felt comfortable, able to be himself. And Harry was generous with his touches, often sliding a hand along his shoulder, or ruffling his hair, or curling up close on the sofa. While Tom wasn’t used to it and would have hexed anyone else who tried it, he couldn’t get enough of it from Harry. It was possibly the happiest Tom had ever been.

Until a month into their cohabitation, when Harry somehow figured out where Tom was keeping his skin.

Tom entered the apartment after work to find Harry stumbling, as if in a trance, toward the cupboard that held his skin. Tom was confident in his spellwork and its ability to keep the selkie away, but when Harry extended a hand to reach out Tom’s fear kicked in. Before he was fully aware of what he was doing, he was across the room and clutching Harry to him, pinning the selkie’s arms to his sides and turning him away from the cupboard.

Awareness returned abruptly to Harry’s eyes. “Whu? Tom, let up a bit, you’re crushing me,” he huffed out. Tom loosened his hold, but didn’t relinquish it, allowing the body heat and chatter of the form in his arms to settle his racing heart.

Later that night, Tom woke, sweat-drenched and shaking, to Harry stroking his back and gazing at him with concern. He rolled onto his side, tucking his head against Harry’s neck and holding the selkie close.

“Don’t leave,” Tom panted hoarsely. “Don’t ever leave me.”

Harry stroked Tom’s hair until he calmed down, but remained silent.

---

Over the following weeks, Tom woke from nightmares of Harry finding his skin and abandoning him more often than not. Between his disrupted sleep and the long, tedious hours he worked at Borgin & Burkes, Tom was exhausted and irritable, snapping at his acquaintances from Hogwarts when they held their weekly meetings and slipping into brooding silences in the evenings.

He wasn't sure how to move forward.

As long as Harry had his selkie skin, he would always be at risk of leaving Tom if he ever found it. But if he was no longer a selkie or Tom destroyed the skin, there was no guarantee Harry would stay with Tom. He would be free to go where he pleased, do as he liked – and maybe that didn't include Tom.

One night, Tom woke, gasping and already looking for Harry beside him to find the selkie sitting up and watching him resignedly.

"Tom," Harry began softly. "I think ye should let me go."

He had Harry pinned beneath him on the bed before he even knew he'd begun to move.

**"No,"** he growled.

"This isn't good for ye," Harry said stubbornly, glaring off to the side. "You're miserable, and it's my fault."

"I don't care, I need you here."

"Ye should care!"

"Do you want to leave?" Tom asked insistently.

Harry's hands clenching hard on Tom's arms answered for him. "No, I don't," he said in a strangled tone. Their eyes met and Tom's Legilimency picked up what Harry wasn't saying, knocking the air from his lungs.

"You wanted me to take your skin."

"Yes," Harry whispered.

"Since we first met."

Quieter still. "Yes."

The two curled up tight together, Harry's head on Tom's shoulder to hide his face.

"But you think you should leave me."

"It's not that I want to leave... It's more that I'm cursed. As long as I'm a selkie, the ocean will always draw me back. And as long as I want to go back, ye'll get hurt," Harry sighed.

"But I don't know if I can go back to being a human."

"But if you could, you would?" Tom asked. After a thoughtful pause, Harry nodded.

"I feel like a pebble at the bottom of a stream – life moves on around me, but I'm stuck in the same place, unchanged. I'm always so hopeful when someone has my skin – that this time I'll be kept, that someone will want me, just Harry, forever. But they want something I can't

give, or they get tired of me, or they. They,” he swallowed hard. “They use the fact that I can’t leave against me.”

Tom’s arms tightened around Harry’s body, squeezing him almost breathless, rage clouding his mind. Harry stroked the shoulder he could reach to soothe Tom’s ire.

“I barely remember my childhood before the sea, but ye reminded me so much of myself when ye first called me,” he murmured. “I wanted so badly for ye to be alright, for ye not to end up like me. I thought, if ye had my skin, I could look after ye.”

Tom was silent for a moment. “Am I simply a stand-in for your younger self?”

“No,” Harry said earnestly. “I- maybe at first, a little bit, but. No.”

Harry’s gaze was firm, though his voice wobbled a little. “I care for ye very much, Tom.”

Tom held the selkie’s gaze as long as he could before his eyes slid to the side, soaking in the feeling of unconditional affection.

“Would you stay with me?” Tom couldn’t help but ask. “If you were human again.”

Harry remained silent, and Tom could feel his heart begin to race. He was saved from working himself into a full panic by Harry, who was staring at him as if he’d been given a gift he’d always wanted.

“I would, yes.”

“Then I suppose I’ll have to find a way to unseal you,” Tom deadpanned.

Harry smacked his shoulder before dissolving into giggles, clutching tight to Tom’s pyjama top. Tom held him close and didn’t think of their impending – though temporary – separation.

---

They spent the next day at their small segment of beach, both feeling a bit more at peace now that they’d come to a decision together.

As the day drew to a close, Tom pressed a ring – old, beaten gold polished to a shine with a large, black stone – into Harry’s hands.

The selkie stared at the ring before looking up at Tom. “What’s this, then?”

“Will you be able to keep it with you while you’re a seal?”

“Yes,” Harry drew the word out, squinting at Tom. “This isn’t just a ring, is it?”

Tom looked back at him evenly. “No, so I’d ask you to take good care of it.”

“Tom.”

“Yes, Harry?”

*“Tom,”* Harry said sharply. “What’s up with the ring?”

Tom shifted. “It seemed only proper that my other half should hold a piece of my soul while we’re apart,” he said stiffly.

Harry’s eyebrows jumped, and he leaned up and pressed his lips to Tom’s in a fierce kiss. “Ye’re such a bloody romantic.”

Tom favoured him with a fondly exasperated look. “Mm. And don’t you forget it.”

And with that, he removed the skin from its hiding place and handed it back to Harry. He stared out into the waves long after the selkie had disappeared.

## Chapter End Notes

I think we're in the home stretch -- just a chapter or two left. Thank you for reading!

## IV (25)

### Chapter Notes

Two more chapters, probably. Also, I'm sorry.

It had been seven years to the day since Harry and Tom had parted. For the first year of their separation, Harry has stuck close to the little beach where he'd always met with his wizard, in case the boy needed him or had found a solution to Harry's transformation more quickly than expected.

But he never showed up.

That was fine. Harry had no idea what exactly had caused him to become a selkie more than two hundred years ago; it stood to reason that it wouldn't be a quick fix.

But Tom had never missed paying him a visit around the seven-year mark, so Harry once again lingered near the beach, hunting in the deeper, open water and resting on the beach or in the shallows. Surely Tom would come, whether he'd figured things out or not.

So, Harry waited.

(26)

And waited.

(27)

And waited.

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Was Tom okay? He knew from the time he'd spent living with his wizard that Tom had grand plans to acquire power and prestige – plans that involved some less than savoury methods and allies. Harry trusted in Tom's self-preservation instincts, but he also knew the wizard's ambitions (and, frankly, arrogance) could get the better of him.

Why hadn't he stayed on land with Tom while he'd researched ways to make Harry human again?

He knew the answer, knew it was still the best option: Harry couldn't control his need to look for his skin, to try to return to the sea, and it would've eventually driven Tom to violence or a nervous breakdown to see it each and every time he looked at Harry.

But now, years and however many miles apart, not knowing whether his wizard was alive and well or not, it was cold comfort.

Another possibility, one Harry tried not to dwell on, one that sunk its claws into him and dragged his hope down to drown it: Tom had abandoned him. Perhaps Tom's own goals had overtaken his desire to have Harry at his side; perhaps he'd found someone else, someone who could help him in achieving his ambitions – someone he didn't have to fix.

Harry didn't think he could take it if he'd been abandoned again.

Especially not by Tom.

Tom needed Harry. He had said he would keep Harry. He'd given Harry a piece of his shattered soul in a ring. Harry wasn't an expert on these things, but that felt significant.

Harry had dared to hope again, after so many disappointments and so much pain. He'd opened his heart and pushed to connect with Tom – one lonely, misunderstood, unloved boy to another. He'd thought that connection was reciprocated.

Was he wrong?

He heard the sounds of children squalling and shouting on the beach. Tom's old orphanage or some new group, come to the seaside: it didn't matter.

Harry turned from the beach and swam away.

## V (31)

### Chapter Notes

I'm sorry for the hurt last chapter. This chapter is where we get fed up with Tom being himself! And Dumbledore pulls a "Heartbreaking: The worst person you know just made a great point."

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Over the years, Tom had become a master at compartmentalisation.

He'd had to. Between his time in muggle London during the war, his consuming rage at his treatment in the magical world, and his yearning for Harry, he would've long gone off the deep end if he couldn't break his thoughts down into manageable little boxes, to be taken out and dealt with when most opportune.

Letting Harry go had been like lopping off a limb. He'd spent the night and day following the selkie's departure curled up on the bed in his tiny flat, holding one of Harry's shirts as tightly as he wished he could hold the boy.

The next morning, he'd woken up, lovingly packed all of his care and longing for Harry into a mental box, and tucked it into a dark, secret part of his mind. And then he'd moved on with his life.

His plans wouldn't make themselves happen, after all.

He worked at Borgin and Burkes until he was able to acquire Slytherin's locket. He rallied his supporters and started to place his pieces to fit with his long-term strategy. He travelled around the world to learn and experience magic in all its forms. And then he returned home, ready to make Magical Britain his.

Every so often, he'd pulled his memories of Harry out to bask in the feeling of warm contentment they held. And for a day or two after each of these visits, he would long to have Harry with him in the flesh. But he always refocused on what needed to be done.

Perhaps it was better to leave things as they were. He missed Harry dearly, but only when he thought of him. While his time with the selkie would be limited, he wouldn't have to worry about sharing him with anyone else, or justifying his methods and plans to someone whose opinion might actually matter to him.

And was there a safer place for a part of his soul than with a possibly immortal magical creature that lived in the ocean?



So, when Tom spotted Harry at the Ministry of Magic's yule celebration, it understandably took him aback. Two distinct parts of his life were suddenly overlapping, and he'd had no hand in it.

He politely but unilaterally disengaged himself from his conversation with a Greengrass to go to his selkie.

Only to be waylaid.

"Ah, Tom, so good to see you," Albus Dumbledore said, eyes twinkling obnoxiously, as he stepped into Tom's path to Harry.

This represented a second deviation from the norm: Dumbledore never came to Ministry 'dos if he could help it. The wizard avoided being forced to socialise at political events with the same stubbornness he applied to offering lemon drops. And since he'd defeated Grindelwald, there wasn't really anyone who told Dumbledore what to do if Dumbledore didn't want to do it.

Ergo, it stood to reason the two discrepancies were related.

"Albus. It's rare to see you away from Hogwarts," Tom replied. "Has a certain green-eyed monster drawn you out?"

Dumbledore chortled. "You could indeed say that."

*("Though it's rich for you to call anyone a monster," went unsaid but not unheard.)*

"It's been many years since I last saw Mr. Potter," the older wizard added. "I couldn't miss the opportunity when it presented itself."

"Well, if you'll excuse me. I'll have to delay your reunion in favour of my own," Tom said, preparing to continue towards the selkie.

"You misunderstand – Harry came to me," Dumbledore corrected.

Tom stopped short. That did make more sense. Security at the Ministry was terrible, but even Tom doubted it was so lax as to let an unaccompanied teenager with no wand and no identification in.

"Did he." Tom felt confusion, hurt, and rage bubble up inside him. Harry was *his*; why would he go to Dumbledore? Why was he on land, in human-form, at all?

"He's looking for a way to become human and thought I might be able to help him," Dumbledore said smugly.

*("Since you obviously couldn't," he didn't-say.)*

"How unexpected (*considering what he thinks of you*). He must have been desperate," Tom sneered.

“Yes, I do believe he was,” Dumbledore replied, gazing over his spectacles at Tom in disappointment. “From what he’s said, the person to whom he initially entrusted the task wasn’t up to the challenge—”

Tom’s wand was in his head, vein jumping at his pulse point, blood-boiling curse on his tongue. Distantly, he noticed Dumbledore had also readied his wand.

“Oi, knock it off, you two!” Harry appeared in time to grab them both by the neck of their robes before they could start firing off hexes or anything more serious than veiled barbs.

“Albus, I came to you because I thought ye could be an adult about this, not so ye could be a petty arse—”

“—I beg your pardon—”

“—and Tom, ye’ve no leg to stand on, I waited *thirteen years* for you to come back,” Harry finally looked at Tom, hurt darkening his eyes. “Were you *ever* planning on coming back to me?”

“I...” Tom was caught speechless for the first time in many years.

Which seemed to be the fuel Harry’s indignant fire needed, as he then proceeded to tear them both a new one from behind a hastily erected silencing charm.

And so it was that the assembled crowd saw two of the most powerful wizards in the world scolded like naughty children by a teenager.

## Chapter End Notes

The resolution?

## V, continued (31)

### Chapter Notes

Chapter count increased because this got away from me and I wanted more banter and angst, apparently. It might be two more, but it's a matter of wrapping things up (truly this time).

Also, shout-out to [L3N](#) -- I was reading through the comments and realized I'd unintentionally used their comments as inspiration for parts of this chapter. Thank you for the comments and the ideas!

Harry noticed their audience not long after he started tearing a strip off his immature companions. He froze up under the many eyes fixed on their motley trio, shrinking into himself slightly. Tom's politician smile made a swift reappearance, though to a trained observer his eyes spelled murder for anyone staring too closely at Harry.

Dumbledore decided to save Harry from the crowd, and the crowd from Tom.

"Might I suggest we take this conversation somewhere a bit less, ah, populated?" he asked.

Which is how they ended up in a private room off the Three Broomsticks' main bar.

(Neutral ground, since Dumbledore didn't want Tom at Hogwarts and Tom refused to allow Dumbledore the knowledge of where he lived.)

Before Dumbledore could start in on the inanities, Tom turned to face Harry, looking betrayed.

"Of all people, why did you go to him?"

"Who else was I supposed to go to?" Harry said. "I had no idea where ye might be, it's not like I know a lot of people who'd still be alive, and Hogwarts, thankfully, always stays in the same bloody place. Albus was the only option."

"Only, and best," Dumbledore added.

"And how – he knew exactly where to find you."

"Because he's *weirdly obsessed* with me," Tom insisted. "He's convinced I'm up to something."

"And why would I think that?" Dumbledore said lightly.

“Because you’ve thought that way since I was eleven and are incapable of admitting you were wrong?” Tom snarked.

“Were I wrong I would admit it, but I’m disinclined to lie.”

“I’m pretty sure that’s a lie,” Harry muttered into his butterbeer.

Dumbledore continued on as though he hadn’t heard. “I may not be interested in participating in politics—”

“—also a lie—” Harry murmured, to Tom’s hummed agreement.

“—but I make it a point to keep abreast of the goings-on at the Ministry, of which you are a part, Tom.”

“And rather than point Harry in my direction, you of course needed to come along,” Tom mocked.

“But of course. I hold a great deal of affection for Harry and feel a vested interest in his happiness. Happiness which I doubt you could supply, having abandoned him in favour of your own selfish pursuits.”

Tom sneered. “You’ll forgive me if I don’t accept relationship advice from a man whose lover’s spat turned into an international, decade-long conflict, and was only resolved after more than forty-five years with a high-stakes duel.”

“That is a gross oversimplification—” Dumbledore blustered.

Harry turned away quickly, and Tom was concerned to see his shoulders shaking. Until he heard the snickers.

“Harry...” Dumbledore said, betrayed.

“Oh, I’m sorry, Albus!” Harry said, somewhat breathless. “But he does have a point – ye’ve made a point of sticking your nose into other people’s business when you’d be better off minding your own.”

Tom’s insufferable smugness - Harry pinched Tom's thigh under the table, but it had little effect - and Dumbledore’s sulking made sure the evening came to a close shortly thereafter.

“Thank ye for your help tonight, Albus,” Harry said, clapping the taller wizard on the shoulder as they left the pub. “And I am sorry about how things went with Gellert. If you ever need a sympathetic ear, just come find me.”

Dumbledore clasped a hand over Harry’s and sent a hard stare in Tom's direction before heading back up towards the castle.

And then they were alone, staring at each other in the empty street.

“Harry...”

Harry looked away, face twisting into a pained smile.

“I’ve missed ye, Tom,” Harry said quietly.

“I’ve missed you, too,” Tom replied shakily. “Very much so.”

He reached out hesitantly, gently pulling Harry towards him. After a moment of resistance, Harry stepped into Tom’s arms. And Tom felt whole for the first time in years.

---

After spending the night curled together, Harry summoned his courage over breakfast and finally asked, “Did ye make any progress on finding out how to make me human again?”

“Hmm? Oh, yes, I found a way,” Tom said distractedly, replying to a piece of owl post.

“You did.” It wasn’t a question; Tom would later regret not paying more attention to that.

“Yes – I came upon a selkie pod living in the Baltic Sea, and between what I learned from them and research into the animagus transformation and childhood accidental magic, I’ve developed a ritual,” he said, proud. “It’s been a little while since I first drafted it, so I might be able to tweak it with the additional knowledge I’ve gained.”

“...how long ago did you create it?” Harry asked quietly.

“Hmm... That would have been in the springtime of 1954, so, almost four years ago,” Tom said, half to himself.

Harry went very still for a moment, staring straight ahead. Then he looked up at Tom with a strange smile on his face. “When can it be ready?”

---

They performed the ritual the following day, after Tom took the time to refamiliarise himself with the design and made some improvements.

In the end, the process itself was quite simple: an array of runes, some admittedly delicate spellwork, and Harry’s seal skin, retrieved from the cave near the beach, and voilà. Harry was once again human, with the seal remaining as his animagus form.

Easy peasy.

---

Tom was drawn out of a deep, restful sleep by a quiet clinking sound, followed by the bedroom door sliding closed.

He opened his eyes to see the Gaunt family ring sitting on the nightstand, glinting ominously in the moonlight. Harry was no longer beside him.

He was on his feet and through the door before he’d fully registered what this meant; all he knew was that he had to get to Harry, immediately.

Spying him near the entrance, Tom practically flew across the room to seize Harry's wrist as it reached for the doorknob, pulling it in to pin against Harry's chest. He wrapped his other arm around the former selkie's waist to trap his angrily writhing body against Tom's larger frame.

"Let me go!"

"No."

"*Tom.*"

"Harry, let's talk about this."

"Talk? You want to talk?" Harry croaked out an ugly laugh. "Fine. Talk to me about how ye knew how to help me for the past four years, but didn't do a damn thing about it. Explain why I had to come find you, after thirteen years, to find out if you were alive or dead. Tell me exactly why I shouldn't leave right now and never see you again."

"You can't leave," Tom blurted.

Harry froze. "I *can't* leave, or you don't want me to leave?"

Tom was silent.

"*Tom...*"

"Both," Tom said stiffly. "The ritual required a stabilising element for your human form to be the default state, so I may have bonded us together to give it the necessary strength."

"...Ye *may* have?"

Tom looked a little embarrassed at being caught out – some things didn't change. "It had to be done."

"And this was in no way because you wanted some way to guarantee I stayed with ye?" Harry said darkly.

Tom didn't speak, but it was a loaded silence.

Harry's form suddenly slumped in his grip. "Let me go, Tom." He sounded so tired suddenly.

"Harry—"

"Let me go before I take your arms off. I need to be away from you for a while."

Tom loosened his grip and Harry turned to face him as he stepped back, towards the door.

"Don't worry, I'll be back." Harry's face twisted in a bitter grin. "You've made sure of that."

Tom stood and watched as Harry left, closing the door quietly behind him. His magic, usually so carefully under control, blew all the light fixtures in the room, leaving him standing, alone,

in the pre-dawn darkness.

## VI (31/32)

### Chapter Notes

CW: panic attack

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Albus Dumbledore was none too pleased to be shocked out of his well-earned holiday lie-in by an insistent knocking at his door. Wrapping a cherry red robe with twinkling, shooting stars around himself, he mentally prepared for anything from student mischief to Dippet's insomnia-fuelled chatter.

Perhaps the world had gone mad in his favour and it would be a repentant Gellert bearing thick, woollen socks. He could dream.

He opened the door to find a sullen Tom Riddle glowering at him.

He drew his wand and cast an absent *tempus* . 8:04 a.m., December 24.

He sighed deeply.

"What have you managed to do to him in *two days and ten hours* that would lead you to my door?" he asked exasperatedly. "I realise I expressed my doubt that you could make Harry happy, but even I thought you could have lasted until the new year."

"Shut up," Tom hissed.

Albus hummed. "No, I don't think I will, my boy."

(He pretended not to hear Tom's mutinous muttering about how *he wasn't Dumbledore's boy*. Selective hearing was a grand thing.)

"You wouldn't be here if you hadn't completely bollocksed things up." Tom's eyes went round and disbelieving at the curse. Albus sighed – young people. Each generation thought they'd invented deviance. "Well, come in. This seems like a conversation to be had over tea rather than through a doorway."

"That won't be necessary," Tom said firmly. "I came to confirm Harry wasn't here, which he isn't—"

Albus turned around and gave Tom a look over the top of his glasses. The younger man's mouth snapped shut in a thin line, eyes staring daggers, but he stepped into Albus' quarters with no more fuss.



Tom sat when he was bid with all the grace of a feral cat, if possessed of better table manners. Albus put the kettle on and fussed over brewing a pot to delay talking to his least favourite former student.

(They were far too similar for Albus to feel otherwise.)

And then they sat in complete silence, drinking their tea and pointedly avoiding eye contact. When the pot was finished, Albus sighed and broke the quietude.

“Well. As one person who has made an absolute hash out of all the best and most important relationships in his life to another, know that I do this out of an abundance of understanding.”

And Albus reached out and slapped the younger man upside the head.

“Oi!”

“Can you fix whatever you’ve done?” Albus asked, ignoring the incensed squawk.

Tom rubbed his head, his irritated glare not fully hiding the lost look in his eyes. “...I don’t know.”

“Then pray that he’s more forgiving than you deserve and do whatever you can to keep him,” Albus said, suddenly weary. “Goodness knows you don’t want to have my regrets in forty years.”

An uncomfortable silence descended on them, and Tom excused himself quietly. Albus summoned a bottle of firewhiskey and set to boiling the kettle anew. If he was going to reminisce, might as well do it with the comforting numbness of a hot toddy or three.

—

Tom knew he could be ...strong-willed, to put it politely. Those who knew him best would likely call him obstinate to a fault, though certainly not within earshot.

(Not if they valued their lives.)

So he left Harry alone, certain he would return sooner than later, if only to appease the pull of the bond.

What he hadn’t factored in was that, if he was stubborn, Harry was a thrice-damned *mule*.

—

When he finally caved days later and made a serious effort to find Harry, the search was short. There was one location that made sense to check first and, lo and behold, Harry was there – at the beach where they’d first met.

The former selkie was sitting on the rocky beach near the water, staring out at the sea. He didn’t turn around as Tom approached, but the tension in his shoulders indicated he knew he was no longer alone.

“Harry.”

“Don’t touch me, Tom, or so help me I’ll curse your ears backwards,” Harry warned quietly.

Tom took the threat to heart, but sat down within arm’s reach of Harry. He found he needed the closeness. (If he hadn’t devised the ritual himself, he might think the bond was affecting him as well.)

Harry looked frayed. The separation must have weighed on him, even if he’d withstood the pull. Tom wasn’t sure what to say – what combination of words would convince Harry to come home with him – so he remained silent. He had to admit, he wasn’t fond of the feeling.

“I should probably be very, very angry with ye for doing that, especially without telling me before we did the ritual,” Harry said eventually, his dimmed green eyes looking emptily at Tom. “I *am* angry, but mostly I’m just so tired. You’ve taken my hope from me, Tom.”

Icy dread sank in his stomach. Harry had always been so warm with him in the past; this blankness was disorienting.

“Harry, you wanted to be human – I gave that to you,” Tom said, pushing through the cold, heavy feeling. He had to fix this. Harry would see sense. “You’re free now.”

“Free?” the younger-looking man huffed. “All that’s changed is you’ve tied me to you with one tether instead of another. Only, with this one, I have no hope of finding someone who’ll trust me to stay now that I could have made that choice.”

Mortified heat flashed through him, his fingers starting to go numb. He needed to breathe.

“I thought you wanted to stay with me,” Tom said insistently, panic welling up under his even façade. “You said you would stay with me.”

“Yes, I wanted to be with ye when we spoke more than a decade ago. Funny how time and neglect changes things,” Harry said bitterly. “And nonconsensual bonding, can’t forget that.”

This was all going so wrong. He had to *fix this*.

“I don’t know what you want from me,” he said tightly, feeling lightheaded. “The ritual can’t be undone; I can’t break the bond.”

“I’d guessed as much.” Harry smiled wryly; his eyes were so *sad*. Was what Tom had done so wrong? Harry was his; why did the specifics matter?

“You can’t leave me.”

He saw Harry’s lips thin, his jaw tense. No. Why couldn’t he say the right words to make this better?

“Anything, I’ll do anything,” Tom pleaded between too-shallow breaths. “Just tell me how I can fix this.”

“Tom?” Harry said, bewildered. He was finally looking at Tom, which had to be a step in the right direction. If only he could get some air.

“Harry, please. Don’t leave me.”

“Oh, for the love of...” Harry muttered, suddenly drawing Tom into an embrace. “Breathe with me, Tom. That’s it. In... and out.”

It took a couple minutes, but between the warmth of Harry’s continued presence and his softly murmured instructions, Tom was able to calm down and catch his breath.

“There ye are,” Harry said, moving as though to pull back. Tom gripped him tightly and the former selkie moved back into the embrace. “You’re alright, my wee wizard.”

Tom pulled Harry as close as he could. *Mine*. For the first time since he’d come upon Harry at the beach, he felt like he was on even ground.

“I don’t claim to know all of it, but I do know ye’ve had a difficult life, Tom. You’ve found ways to live with it, but it’s pretty clear to me how afraid and angry you are, how it guides your decisions,” Harry said quietly. “That doesn’t excuse what you’ve done to me, but it does mean I understand it just a little bit.”

“I’m sorry.” Though muffled into Harry’s shoulder, he knew the other had heard it from Harry’s sudden stillness. It was the first time Tom had ever said it and meant it.

Harry’s hand began to soothe across Tom’s back.

“I’ll need space,” Harry whispered. “And time.”

“Anything,” Tom said hoarsely; he meant this, too. “Just don’t leave me.”

Harry was silent for several moments.

“Okay.”

And it would be.

There will probably be one more chapter with a couple little snippets that didn't make it into the main fic, but this story is effectively complete.

Whether you've been reading since I first posted this fic or you've just discovered it, thank you for reading! I hope you enjoyed it. Extra special thanks to anyone who has kudos, bookmarked, and/or commented. It's a really lovely feeling to know people are interacting with my work.

# Extras

## Chapter Summary

Bits and bobs that didn't fit into the story proper, but I thought I'd share anyway. They are on the sillier side, so take them as a palate cleanser after the bittersweetness of the ending.

## Chapter Notes

Did I add a chapter because I like round numbers? ...Maybe.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

### **The Ending that Almost Was**

Harry wavered. "I'll return with ye if you apologise."

"...Very well. I apologise, Harry."

"What are you sorry for doing?" He squinted at Tom sceptically.

"I'm not sorry," Tom said. "I'm only apologising because you told me to."

"Tom."

"What?"

The former selkie sighed deeply. "At least pretend to be sorry. We'll be here all night otherwise."

Tom tsked. "I have been persuaded to be sorry that I bonded you without your consent."

"...Good enough. Let's go home."

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### **Tom throws Dumbledore under the bus**

“What are you muttering about?” Harry said from where he was doing the dishes. No matter how many times Tom explained they could be done with magic, Harry always did them by hand. He still took every opportunity to be in contact with water; Tom was starting to think that would always be a part of the other man.

“Plotting Dumbledore’s demise,” he replied absently. “I’m trying to decide whether it has to be at my hands, or if I could use a proxy to take the fall.”

“Ah. Has he done something specific recently, or is planning how you’ll kill Albus just something you do when you have a spare moment?” Harry asked, bemused.

Tom paused for just a moment, considering whether he wanted to bring this up.

“He hit me.”

Of course he did. The old goat had brought this upon himself, vaguely helpful though he’d been.

Harry froze, hands stilling in the hot, soapy water. He turned slowly to look at Tom, checking that he wasn’t pulling Harry’s leg. The longer Harry looked, the higher the flames of righteous fury rose in his eyes.

“He did what,” Harry said in a soft, dangerous tone.

“When I went to see if you’d gone to stay with him in December,” Tom clarified. That was as close as he’d get to referencing their brief separation. “He invited me in to chat, by which he meant ‘be scolded,’ and during the course of it he slapped me.”

The line of Harry’s jaw went forebodingly tense. After a few moments, he turned back to the sink, but his shoulders remained strained and his washing technique was far more aggressive than it had been previously. He even broke a plate, repairing it with a curse.

This was going to be spectacular.

Tom was still planning Dumbledore’s murder for sooner than later, but he could admit that knowing he’d get to see his sweet Harry viciously ripping into the old man soothed his immediate need for blood.

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### **Speaking in (split) tongues**

- for [AnaLauter](#)

One sunny summer day, Tom returned home from the ministry for lunch to find Harry in the garden.

This was hardly unusual, as Harry had been adamant they needed a vegetable garden. In the two and a half years he'd been living with Tom, Harry had taken it upon himself to transform a portion of the property into an oasis of tomatoes, cucumbers, leafy greens, courgettes, bell peppers and turnips, with smatterings of herbs throughout and a thriving patch of tiger lilies on one side. He seemed most content when he'd spent a few hours mucking about in the soil and tending the plants.

What stopped Tom short this day was seeing Harry laid out on his back, chattering at a grass snake. In parseltongue.

Tom Riddle didn't do anything so undignified as running, but he managed to make it out of the house and over to his partner quite rapidly all the same.

"Tom?" Harry said in the snake language, looking concerned. *"What's the matter?"*

"You're a parselmouth?!" he hissed.

"A what?" Back to English, with no indication he knew he'd switched.

"A parsel— you can speak to snakes, Harry."

"Oh, yes! I can."

"...Did that not strike you as strange?"

Harry shrugged. "A little, but I guess I thought it was part of the whole magic thing."

"You are painfully incurious about some things." Tom wished he was more curious about the things that didn't lead to new and horrifying stories of reckless self-endangerment, but then Harry wouldn't be the man he loved.

—

Later that day, over dinner, Tom had a revelation.

"Oh bollocks," he cursed. "Parseltongue is hereditary. Does this mean we're related?"

"Tom. I'm more than two-hundred and thirty years older than you and have no direct descendants," Harry replied dryly. "I promise you that even if we are, it's not that close."

"...Right."

## Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading! ♡





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