

## The Conversation

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I paced through my throne room like the God on Earth that I was. There was just something special about the fear of my assembled Death Eaters. The way they cowered at my feet, their abject terror that I might call upon them to explain their latest misstep.

It almost made up for the report that Dumbledore still lived. Almost.

Snape had turned out to be a traitor... Why? Why had the Potions Master betrayed me? I knew his mind; he was in complete agreement with my goals. Why had Severus Snape gone to Dumbledore? Because I killed the Potter woman so long ago? Was he truly that obsessed with a mere woman? I shook my head. It didn't matter; Snape was now marked for death, and was no doubt in agony now from the punishment charm I had directed toward my Mark on his arm. A small taste of what was to come.

That was when it happened. Without warning my anti-apparation wards were breached. A sharp crack was the only announcement that the wards had failed... no not failed, the warding scheme announce that the traveler was keyed to the ward... but I was the only one keyed to the ward.

In the middle of the chamber a cloaked figure stood. I drew my wand as my Death Eaters scattered pulling away from this figure that had demonstrated such phenomenal power as to penetrate my sanctum.

"Who are you?" I called

The man threw back his cloak to reveal the young man I hated more than any other.

"Potter!" I hissed.

Before I could react, Potter raised his wand toward the ceiling. "I am Harry, son of James, Grandson of Charlus, heir to the houses of Potter and Black. I come to the fortress of my enemy, Tom, son of Merope, grandson of Marvolo, heir to the houses of Gaunt and Slytherin, and call for Parley!" The boy's wand pulsed and I felt the sympathetic answer of my own wand as the call for Parley was sealed.

There was no rejecting a call for Parley. He had come of his own free will. The magic of the Parley would bind me to allowing him his confrontation and allowing him to leave without pursuit for twelve hours. Either of us attempting to use magic on the other would result in the betrayer's horrible death.

Where had Potter learned of the Ancient call for Parley?

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It took most of twenty minutes to have an appropriate meeting room set up and for my 'devoted' followers to be banished from Potter's presence before one of them did something that violated the Parley. None of them understood the risk that violating the Parley involved.

I still don't know why that surprised me. After all the bulk of my followers were graduates of Hogwarts under Dumbledore's guidance as Headmaster. I had by that point long suspected that the poor quality of instruction at the school reputed worldwide to be the premier school of magic was part of a plot on Dumbledore's part to ensure that there was no one who could challenge him.

That didn't answer the question of where Potter had learned of Parley. Was this the latest of Dumbledore's traps?

I stared at the boy over the table, and he returned my gaze with one of his own. He seemed... resigned to what was about to happen. The silence between us stretched into five minutes, so I attempted a probe of legilimency. I found no barriers at all. The boy had left his mind open to me, in fact I found a surface thought that all but welcomed me into his mind. This wasn't the child I had seen in Quirrell's class, the boy I had faced over my father's grave or the angry young man I possessed in the Ministry of Magic's atrium. My presence didn't even cause him pain any longer. What was going on?

Potter sighed. "So, what should I call you?"

"Excuse me?" I responded. That wasn't a question I expected from the boy. "I am Lord Voldemort!" I declared.

"Yeah yeah yeah," Potter sighed again rolling his wand hand signaling that I should hurry. "I know all about your anagram of Tom Marvolo Riddle. Your first Horcrux was a chatty bastard. My name anagramizes out to Pyjamas the Terror. Big deal. What should I call you?"

I glared at the presumptuous boy. It wasn't until later I realized that he knew about my Horcruxes.

"Alright, fine. I know you hate Tom, so I'll call you Riddle, Ok?" He gestured toward his face. I notice the bruising for the first time. "Do you mind if I heal myself while we talk. If I read the rules of Parley right the only magic we're allowed to cast has to be approved by the other."

"That's quite the beating Potter, who else wants you dead?" I asked.

"Oh, this?" Again he gestured toward his face, "No, this is from not being able to convince my friends that evoking Parley was a good idea. They tried to stop me." With a grunt of pain he placed his left hand on the table top where I could see three dislocated fingers. "So? Healing?"

I nodded. He ran his wand along the first of his damaged fingers and sighed with relief as the joint was repaired. "What do you want Potter?" I ground out through clenched teeth.

The boy shrugged. "It occurred to me that we've never talked, you know? Oh we've spoken a few times, you sneer at me and talk of how superior you are compared to me, tell me I'm, about to die, and I've usually tried to come up with some adult sounding responses, but we've never really, you know, talked. It's always 'this is your last day Potter' and 'you'll have to work at it Voldemort' and bullshit like that. I mean we've been tied together for my entire life and we've never really spoken."

"So, you came here today in order to speak with me?" I asked incredulously.

"Yeah. I wanted to know why you've done all this."

"For the power, Potter. I was born to rule!"

"For the power? How's that working out for you? I mean you surround yourself with whining idiots like the Malfoys and hide in this... dump."

I touched his mind again, which coincided with yet another sigh from the boy. His earlier welcome was still there. I found the memory of how he learned of Parley... The Mudblood Granger.

"Cute isn't she?" The boy asked. "Scary smart too, but definitely cute."

"A proper wizard would never sully himself by dallying with such an abomination." I sniffed.

"Ouch!" Potter said with an odd expression. "That cuts a bit close to home doesn't it Riddle? Of course I can console myself that my mother was at very least a witch, while your dear old dad was a plain old fashioned Muggle."

I glared at the boy in a way that would have caused the most hardened of my Death Eaters to soil himself. For all the effect it had, I need not have bothered.

"What do you want Potter? The sooner this is over the sooner I can kill you and carry on with my conquest of Britain."

"That's what I want to know. Why are you doing this? Why do you want to become the king of the sheep?"

His audacity astounded me. "What do you mean?"

"Your Death Eaters are among the most independent people of the Wizarding world, and they throw themselves at your feet in terror. How do you suppose the average wizard in the street is going to react to you?"

"With fear!" I exclaimed.

"And that does it for you? Dumbledore has told me a bit about your childhood. You had a rough life. So did I. When was it you decided that your life goal was to be a twat?"

I couldn't believe this boy dared speak to me in such a way. "This parley isn't going to last forever Potter. I will make you regret ever being born."

The boy actually looked bored. "And you haven't already done that during any of the times you've tried to kill me before?"

It was a novel experience to discover someone that wasn't frightened by my power. I didn't like it.

I forced myself to smile. "When I torture your Mudblood and your other friends to death in front of you, you will learn the price of your defiance Potter."

The boy just shook his head. "God you're a twat. You could have done so much, but you had to turn yourself into... well, you."

"What are you talking about?" I demanded.

"You were handsome, smart, and stupidly powerful. You found the freaking Chamber of Secrets, something that scholars had been seeking for centuries; you were the heir of Salazar Slytherin. You would have been celebrated for finding the Chamber alone. You could have claimed your family's seat on the Wizengamot being the first in centuries with the bloodline, intelligence and power to claim it. You could have changed the world for the better."

"That's what I'm doing boy!" I spat.

"No, Riddle it isn't what you're doing. What you're doing is surrounding yourself with the dregs of the world, hiding from what you are, pretending to be a pureblood and praying every day that I don't kill you again."

My fury burned hotter than ever. "You didn't kill me, you got lucky boy. The only reason you survived is that the magic of a prophecy protected you."

Potter made a derisive noise. "You had your free look. But I'll tell you the prophecy, because it doesn't mean anything, not anymore." He paused, seemed to concentrate and recited: "*The one with the power to vanquish the - Dark Lord approaches... born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies... and the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal, but he will have power the Dark Lord knows not... and either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives... the one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord will be born as the seventh month dies...*"

The boy knew the prophecy? I drove a probe back into his mind. I would strip the knowledge from his brain and ...

Nothing. Where before his mind had been open to me, now all I found was... nothing.

"Nope," the boy said shaking his head. "You had your free look. But I'll tell you the prophecy, because it doesn't mean anything, not anymore." He paused, seemed to concentrate and recited: "*The one with the power to vanquish the - Dark Lord approaches... born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies... and the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal, but he will have power the Dark Lord knows not... and either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives... the one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord will be born as the seventh month dies...*"

To actually hear the full prophecy... I couldn't believe it. So, I thought as I parsed the prophecy in my mind, what power could Potter possibly have that I didn't know? "What is this power of yours Potter?"

"No idea." Potter grinned. "It doesn't matter because I've already fulfilled it, if I believed that sort of thing, which I don't."

"What do you mean you've already fulfilled it?"

"Isn't it obvious?" He asked, running his wand over his left cheek closing the cut and healing the bruise. "I killed you back in '81. You were quite thoroughly vanquished."

"Potter, you idiot. I'm sitting right here!" I all but screamed at him. Did he really believe that he had vanquished *ME* ?

"You asked," he said with a sigh, setting his wand down on the table top now that he was finished healing himself. "Well, if you don't want to discuss why you've done this to yourself and you won't explain the path you've taken to achieve your goals, how about we talk about some of the things I've discovered over the last few weeks... Like how I defeated your defenses to get here."

The boy was actually smirking at me. "As I said before, the Parley won't last forever Potter. I guarantee that you are going to suffer the torments of Hell before I allow you to die.

"You're interested then? Well it's something of a long story. Dobby?"

There was a pop and a particularly manic House Elf was standing on the table between us.

"Yes Harry Potter Sir? How can Dobby help the Great Harry Potter?"

"You have your elf address you like that? It appears that Severus wasn't lying about your ego." I noted.

"I want him to call me Harry, and he's not 'my elf' he's my friend." Potter said shaking his head. "That's another thing you have in common with Dumbledore. You both take the word of a man so petty as to hate me because my father was mean to him when they were in school. Twats the pair of you."

That seemed to have touched a nerve. "What of Snape?"

"He's a cunt. And I don't mean that in a nice way. Dobby could you bring in some tea please?"

"Yes Harry Potter sir! Would Evil Dead Snake Wizard want tea too?"

I really did want some tea, but I wasn't going to admit it to Potter. I shook my head and added the mouthy House Elf to the list of people and creatures to torture to death in front of Potter before I kill him.

There was a short pause while the elf got Potter his tea and popped away to where ever elves go when they aren't needed.

"Well, as you might have guessed Dumbledore knows about your Horcruxes."

I hadn't known or even suspected that. That when I recalled Potter calling my first Horcrux a 'chatty bastard'. I would have to make sure that the precious items were safe. I nodded. No sense in letting the boy know that I had been caught off guard. If my first diary actually was compromised, Lucius was going to have some explaining to do.

"You can thank Lucius Malfoy for that by the way. If he hadn't planted your diary on Ginny Weasley Dumbledore would probably never have sussed out that you had made them.

That was when I decided to kill the entire Malfoy family.

Anyway, Dumbledore knows about your Horcruxes, and I had pulled together my friends to figure out how to find them. We had been working on the various ways of tracing the damned things when one of my friends had a revelation."

"Let me guess. Granger the Mudblood." Far too many times I was treated to the Malfoy spawn whining about that girl.

"No, not Hermione. Not Padma Patil, Su Li, Tracey Davis, or Hannah Abbott either. No it wasn't one of the geniuses working with me to defeat you that stumbled onto the clue. It was Ron Weasley. The girls were going on about how Horcruxes had been around since the Dynastic Egyptians and

Ron just asked a question.”

In spite of myself, I wanted to know where Potter was going with this. “And what did the boy ask?”

Ron sat in the middle of all the discussion of the dark magic involved in what you did and said ‘You know Harry, if Horcruxes have been around since the Egyptians were building pyramids, why aren’t we hip deep in ancient Egyptians?’”

That was actually a good question, one I pondered on myself when I was first researching the possibility of immortality.

“Ron’s question stopped all of us in our tracks. We spent the next two days talking about just why there weren’t any surviving Egyptians. Then we changed the track of our research. We didn’t spend anymore time on trying to figure out how to detect the damned things, instead we started looking into their history. You’ll never guess what we found.”

“What?” I asked. “What did you find?”

“Horcruxes don’t work. Oh you can tie a portion of your soul to a physical object, but doing so doesn’t anchor your life force to this plane of existence, it just causes you to go slightly mad.. If the soul fragment is removed from the charmed object it dies.” The boy laughed “Your first Horcrux tried to return himself to life by possessing Ginny Weasley and using her life force to bring himself back. I ended up fighting Slytherin’s Basilisk to stop that, and it turns out I did it for no reason. As soon as your sixteen year old shade had separated itself from the diary it would have vanished in a puff of magic and Ginny would have been fine.”

“What do you mean they don’t work. Of course they work Potter. I am evidence of their functionality,” the boy’s ignorance astounded me.

“Think about it Riddle. Do you really believe that you are the first to actually try it? Of course you aren’t. You aren’t even the first to try the whole ‘Seven is a significant magical number’ idea. They don’t work. The historical record is filled with fools who tried and failed to make it work. You were just the most recent.”

I was speechless for a few moments digesting what Potter said. I had never looked into the history of the Horcrux, just the implementation... what if Potter was... No it wasn’t possible; after all, I was alive.

“How do you explain me then Potter?”

“Your continued existence was a puzzle, I do admit. Until we made an important discovery, and we have you to thank for it.”

“What do you mean?”

“You killed an Auror in full view of Amelia Bones. During the autopsy of that Auror a standard scan of the magical signature of the caster of the spell that killed him was taken.”

The boy was playing games, doling out his story in bits and pieces, trying to make me ask him for the information. “And?”

“It was mine.”

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The boy took a long sip at his tea. What was he telling me? The man I killed showed signs of having been killed using Potter’s magic?

“What?”

“You killed him using my Magic. That answered a lot of questions actually. All the healers tell us that the magical core is somehow tied to the physical body, the literature has several examples of people being possessed by wraiths having only the magical potential of the possessed magic user, yet you still had magic as a disembodied wraith. Our wands are near matches, I’ve always had problems with small everyday magic, but the big flashy stuff? I do that with little or no effort. You’ve been siphoning off a portion of my magical core since I was fifteen months old.”

Potter leaned back in his chair. “It’s lucky for me that you killed the man in front of Amelia Bones and that when you did it I was with Susan Bones or I might have had some explaining to do, what with so many in the ministry being out for my head the way Malfoy pays them to be.” He grinned, “For that matter, I didn’t really want to explain to Madam Bones what Susan and I were doing when you killed the Auror either, so that really worked out for me.”

I was finding it a bit difficult to breath. Potter had to be lying. He had to be lying. “How could I possibly be using your magic?”

“The answer is my scar.” Potter picked up his wand and tapped the lightning bolt scar with the tip. “You know, Dumbledore believes it to be an unintentional Horcrux, and attributes the connection between us to it being one.”

“That makes sense.” I couldn’t believe that I was agreeing with Dumbledore.

“Oh really? We found the ritual needed to make a Horcrux. Do you really believe you could have done that ‘unintentionally’? For that matter, do you have any connection with your other Horcruxes? Can you hear Nagini’s thoughts or does your presence cause her pain? Get serious Riddle, you’re smarter than that. This scar isn’t a Horcrux,” he tapped it again. “It’s a conduit between us. A leech, drawing on my magic and feeding it to you.”

“No...” I gasped.

"When you cast the killing curse on me in my crib, my magic reacted to it with sufficient power to destroy your body and most of the cottage. This somehow formed the conduit between us. That connection anchored your consciousness to this plane of existence... somehow." He seemed to enjoy my reaction to his theories. "Now that I know it's my magic you're throwing around, I can use it. You only have the power I allow you to have, and right now I'm not feeling too generous, you know?"

A feeling of horror filled me. "That means..."

"That means you can't kill me, or you die. Your Death Eaters can't kill me, or you die. It means that you are limited to my lifetime. It means that there is no immortality for you." The boy leaned forward over the table. "It means that any magic you do, I have access to. Your wards? As long as you are keyed into them, I am keyed into them. If I were to pick up my wand and curse you and violate the Parley, I would likely lose my magic. You would die."

"The boy obviously hadn't thought this through. "But I can imprison you. I can use potions to extend your life until such time as I can separate this body from your magic."

He actually rolled his eyes at me. "Ah, you caught me. The idea that you might, oh I don't know, try something like that, never occurred to me when I decided to tell you about our little situation. I mean it isn't very likely that I might have taken a time delayed poison that would kill me if you did somehow manage to violate the Parley and survive. Is it?"

He wasn't telling me everything. What had I missed? Only everything so far. A distant feeling of panic, something I haven't felt since that night in 1981, was nipping at my consciousness.

"Either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives..." the little bastard was enjoying this. "That bit makes a little more sense now doesn't it? I can't move on to my full potential as long as you're drawing on my magic. You can't conquer the world without your own magic now can' you?"

"I will survive this Potter. I always survive."

"Maybe you will Riddle, I doubt it, but it's possible I suppose."

"Why are **YOU** doing this?" I demanded. "If what you say is true, you never needed to come here. You could have done whatever it is your women told you to do to break the conduit from the safety of your common room. Why are you here?"

"A lot of reasons. You and your megalomania cost me my parents, my godfather, any semblance of a normal life, and allowed Dumbledore to sentence me to sixteen years of life with the only surviving members of my family who hated me and made sure I knew it." The boy picked up his wand again and tapped his scar and then began twirling the wand between the fingers of his right hand. "And mostly because I wanted to see your face when I did this." He jabbed his wand at the scar over his eyes while whispering a healing charm and I knew nothing.

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"And then I was here."

Once again I looked around what appeared to be some sort of office. The man behind the desk who had been asking the questions was dressed in the manner of the administrators of the orphanage when I was a child. He didn't seem all that interested in the answers I offered; rather he simply asked his question and made notes of my answers as they poured out of me.

"Thank you Mr. Riddle." He completed a few notes and tore off a ticket from a roll at the side of his desk. "This will take you through to the Evaluation section for your final Judgment. Again I apologize for your wait; we were swamped today for some reason."

"That's mostly my fault," I admitted. There was something about this place that forced you to speak the truth. "My Death Eaters were tied to my life force via their Dark Marks. The loss of the magic sustaining me drained them."

"Yes," the man said dryly, "I know. The door to the Evaluation section is the second on your left. Next!"