

Taking the Mark

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Taking the Mark

by [TnT6713](#)

Summary

"Unlike Sirius, you want to be part of something bigger than yourself. Unlike Sirius, you believe there are things bigger than yourself."

Notes

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

The Slytherin Common Room tends to resemble large family gatherings at times, weddings and Christmases, due largely both to the dwindling number of Pureblood families remaining in Great Britain and to the nasty habit your family has of spurning anyone who defects even slightly from the carefully-lain path of your ancestors, including preferred Hogwarts House. This is a truth you've known all your life, but that you seem to be re-learning with stern frequency as of late, like two years ago when you overheard Sirius contemplating a gift for Cousin Andromeda's half-blood baby's first birthday, or the events of this summer that you don't like to talk about. It's funny to think, sometimes, that these people, your classmates, your friends— if they're your friends (because you're sure there's a fair few of them who are just waiting for you to out yourself as a blood traitor like your brother)— are the same people whose parents your mother has been parading you around to in the hopes of creating some promise of holy Pureblood matrimony since you were just shy of thirteen. There are things you've learned in the last five years, and more to be revealed in the coming two, that you're sure would horrify your mother and almost completely derail her quest to find you a suitable wife among the thinning throng: Greengrass, as you learned during a particularly entertaining round of Truth or Dare on Halloween one year, sucked her thumb all the way through Second Year, and her parents had to send her to a specialist to charm her into stopping; the Carrows have only ever seemed to have eyes for each other (though, honestly, you sometimes imagine that if you had a sister, it might go much the same way: you would be hard-pressed to find another girl who lived up to your mother's standards); Rosier may be a nancy boy, if the rumors are true, which they usually are, but you certainly aren't (and you're sure he'll end up with a perfectly unassuming girl anyway, maybe Flint or Fawley), and even if you were, Walburga Black is an unrelenting woman, desperate not to be the last generation of Black to produce an heir, and now that Sirius— well, you've got to be the one to carry on the family name, a duty far too important to be hinged on something as menial as attraction.

There are lots of Half-bloods in your year, yes, even in your House, and you wonder if perhaps they'll have you wait until one of the younger girls is old enough to wed, maybe Travers or Selwyn, just entering their Third and Fifth Years, respectively— or perhaps they'll stick you with some older girl, someone maybe who has already taken the Mark, someone they might have been saving for Sirius had things turned out differently (your mind jumps to Macmillan, funnily enough, but there's a blood traitor if you've ever seen one, and you'd like to think you know a thing or two about blood traitors: you were raised alongside one, both down in his shadow and up on the pedestal he chose to leave empty). You wonder how different your prospects would look had Sirius been who he was meant to be, if all the good ones would fight over his natural charm and wit, over his effortless good looks, and the unlucky ladies rejected by His Highness would be disappointed to settle for you, if you would be left to perpetually pick up his sloppy seconds (because Sirius could corrupt a nun, if he wanted to, and you're certain all he'd have to do was smile before he could screw the propriety out of even the most dignified and respectable Pureblood girl; you still don't understand how he didn't get sorted into Slytherin), or if perhaps it would be easier, fathers more willing to sign over their daughters to families that *hadn't* borne any blood traitors. But you suppose you'll never know.

If a respectable girl with a good sense of propriety is all you need, there are a fine lot in Slug Club with you, girls of wealth and status, though dismally lacking in some of the stricter

requirements of Black wives: House, allegiance, blood. Some of them are fine people, sweet and kind, some are even *pretty* (though the word means so little both in its ability to be defined and in its role in determining whom you will wed), but sometimes it feels as though Professor Slughorn will let just anyone into Slug Club, despite that being the exact opposite of the club's purpose. After all, he let Evans in— a Mudblood and a Gryffindor, to boot— and though she used to spend inordinate amounts of time with Snape (himself only a Half-blood; his interests and intentions are in the right place, but his lineage betrays him), you know she's found herself welcome in the company of your brother, not to mention the disheveled boy, Lupin, who's probably a half-breed or something equally vile. You wonder sometimes where Professor Slughorn finds these people. You do enjoy Slug Club, even if you find sometimes that its members are of dubious quality, though you're sure plenty of them would say the same about you, the— in the minds of those whose opinions are inconsequential to you— inferior Black, not particularly skilled at any one thing, aside from Quidditch, of course (and you'll be damned before you let anyone strip you of the glory of last year's twelve-game winning streak), remarkable, you're sure, at least to some of them, only as a link between their frail teenage hearts and the elusive yet dashing Sirius Black, never mind the ridiculous sum of money you're poised to come into should any tragedy befall your parents.

You stopped counting after Christmas back in Fourth Year the number of well-meaning but ultimately deplorable girls, and even a few blokes (Hufflepuffs, Half-bloods, worse, all of it), who have come to you to find out if The Great Sirius Black is all he's cracked up to be, or to find some way into what they assume is Sirius' circle (the idea being that they can butter you up and then simply slide from one brother to the other, as long as it's all in the family, as though you two regularly share this way), or to seek revenge after having been rebuked, trying to get caught fraternizing with the enemy in the hopes it will make Sirius upset. But they know, they all must know, that you are no substitute for your brother. You don't try to be. Unlike Sirius and his rabid fans, you're interested in doing right by your family, in doing right by your superiors. Unlike Sirius, you want to be part of something bigger than yourself. Unlike Sirius, you believe there are things bigger than yourself.

Nott calls to you from the corner of the Common Room, nestled out of the ickle First Years' earshot, interrupting your path. You tuck your History of Magic textbook under your arm as you make your way toward your colleagues, noting with a derisive sort of amusement the very calculated distance, close but not too close, Rosier sits from Nott, a comfortable but not at all casual few inches. A smirk twitches at the corner of your lips when you meet Rosier's eyes, and you wonder if he knows the things that people say about him. You wonder if they're true, and you wonder if he cares, but mostly you wonder if he knows. It would be rather sad, you think, if he didn't. Greengrass and Crabbe are there, too, Greengrass perched on the arm of the sofa Crabbe lies across, his head nearly in her lap. They fall quiet when you approach, as though they'd been talking about you, and only now have just noticed that you're in the room. You're almost surprised Amycus isn't here, all of the Slytherin Sixth Year Boys' dorm present (plus Greengrass, of course), but then the only time one ever sees Amycus both outside the dorm and without the company of his sister is at Quidditch, and Alecko, as she will gladly and loudly tell anyone within earshot, absolutely hates Nott (he and Amycus got into a rather nasty fight back in Third Year, and Professor Slughorn gave them each a month's detention, and though they've both long since moved on, Alecko, frightfully, hasn't).

You settle into the armchair that closes the circle, Greengrass on your left (close enough to reach out and tuck a few errant strands of your long, dark hair behind your ear with a, “Hullo, Regulus,” and if you were a lesser man you would probably kiss her hand, but as it is you merely tell her that it’s a pleasure, as always, to see her), Nott, who has neither time nor concern for your niceties, on your right. Crabbe shifts, eager to regain Greengrass’ attention but desperate to remain aloof, a child who was never taught how to ask for what he wants. You don’t particularly enjoy thinking of yourself as above these people (because they are, in the ways that count, your equals), but sometimes you find it impossible to deny the evidence of poor breeding.

“So,” Nott begins, the verbal equivalent of snapping his grubby fingers in front of your face to get you to pay attention. “We wanted to know if you’d heard about Snape.”

“Snape?” you repeat. You’re tempted to ask who exactly this “we” is, and what the lot of them know that you don’t, but you know that that’s no way to talk to people who have things that you want, unless you’re looking to come off paranoid, like a rat, like a sneak. “What about him?”

“He’s taking the Mark,” Greengrass supplies, running her fingers languidly through Crabbe’s hair.

You look around the circle, searching for some clue in your colleagues’ faces that this is some joke and you’re meant to start laughing, but all you find is two boys, Greengrass, and Rosier waiting for you to react. And you certainly would like to react, because you know you’ve certainly got a lot to say about Snape taking the Mark, but you remain staunchly unconvinced that this is real, that they aren’t trying to make a fool of you in public (the public of the Slytherin Common Room, that is, of course, as if you could risk having this kind of discussion anywhere above sea level).

“Regulus...?” Greengrass asks, quietly, concerned.

“Snape? What, did he tell you that?” Your eyes land on Nott, but it’s a question for the group, and it’s Crabbe who answers.

“He told Mulciber, and then Mulciber—”

“Mulciber told me,” Rosier cuts in, the first thing he’s said all evening, and you can tell by the way he glances at Nott that he’s proud of himself for speaking and he’s proud of himself for being part of the story. The pecking order reveals itself: Snape reports to Mulciber, Mulciber to Rosier, Rosier to Nott, Nott to you. You wonder who else knows, Yaxley or Crouch, Wilkes or Avery, or perhaps the Carrows (the Carrows took the Mark last year, came back branded after Easter, some of the earliest, trendsetters— though you’d hardly consider loyalty a trend; in fact, it rather seems to be going out of style). You wonder again if this is real.

“So you mean to tell me,” you say, slowly, after a terribly long stretch of Rosier and Nott and Greengrass just looking at you, and Crabbe looking at Greengrass, “that Snape— Half-blood Snape— is taking the Mark? What, a Mudblood breaks his heart and suddenly he thinks he’s fit to be a follower of the Dark Lord? I’m sorry, I don’t trust it. I don’t trust him.”

“Well, he’s not doing it *now*, obviously,” Nott offers, as if that’s meant to help make the whole situation in any way less a disgusting besmirchment of all the Dark Lord stands for, all taking the Mark means. It isn’t right. “He says he’s going to wait until he leaves school. A year is loads of time, maybe he’s coming ‘round.”

You shake your head. “We don’t need Half-bloods on our team. Hell, if we let just anyone join, then what’s even the point? If we’ve got Muggle-sympathizing Half-bloods taking the Mark, then who are we? What do we stand for? When did sheer numbers become more important than our integrity, than what we believe in? How can we advocate for purity, for keeping magic clean, if we’ve got dirty blood doing the talking for us?”

They look at each other, searching for answers, maybe, or guidance. You aren’t sure what they expected from you, but you can feel your pulse racing, because some things are just unforgivable: disloyalty, for one, and dishonesty. At sixteen, you’ve already been burned enough to last a lifetime, and the last thing you need is another traitor in your midst.

Cautiously, but with great courage (something this girl has more of in her little toe than Rosier and Nott and Crabbe have in their whole bodies), Greengrass asks, “Are *you* going to take the Mark, Regulus?”

You meet her eyes for a moment, maybe, perhaps less, and find nothing there, nothing to help you understand her question, which is one you and your circle have discussed before, perhaps not at length, but at all—but things have changed since the last time, this you know, circumstances have shifted, and where perhaps six months ago you were willing to espouse your beliefs but content to stay safe and comfortable on the sidelines, now you are ready to fight. Since the Incident, for you, the question was not one of *if* but one of *when*; these are things that, in your desire never to speak of the Incident, to remember around it, as though it never happened, you have forgotten to tell your friends. There are holes in your heart, yes, puncture wounds from countless magicless curses, times you made a martyr of yourself to protect your ilk because someone had told you that blood was thicker than water, but that’s only half the idiom, and if the blood of the covenant truly is thicker than the water of the womb, then you are ready to alter the map of your skin, to commit yourself wholly to the cause, to make that dark covenant, and Sirius is right (because Sirius is always right): you don’t have a brother. You can still hear him asking, begging, pleading you to come with him, but by that point it was already too late: you knew Sirius disagreed with you fundamentally on everything you hold dear, and no amount of brotherly affection could change that he was someone you didn’t want to become, someone you didn’t want to know. You can still see the betrayal in his eyes, how utterly heartbroken he was to learn that you are your own person, you can make your own decisions, you don’t need him to look after you—but he should have known, should have understood, that he made his choice when he was sorted, and so did you. You can still feel the imprint of his hand on your chest, pushing you nearly down the stairs in his haste to get out, because he has always been impulsive and sensitive and easily bruised, a weak boy who hides his sad, soft flesh behind a thick shell of bravado, but you have always been able to see through his disguise to the neglected child he will always be, a victim of arrested development. You wonder if you’re the first person who’s ever said no to him.

You think of Slug Club, and how much you enjoy these little privileges, the delights of being from a good family and in a good House and on good terms with the right people, the power

of exclusivity and knowing that you are on the correct side of the velvet rope, that you have what other people want (and it's petty, you know, to qualify your social success like this, to make believe that being a part of something great makes you, in turn, great— though you know this to be true, you find that Slug Club is hardly the pinnacle of greatness— but you find comfort in it regardless, comfort and strength: there are so many people who want you to be Sirius, in so many ways, for so many reasons, at so many times, and so many find themselves unsatisfied with your parody of a boy who pretends to be a man, but this is something you have that Sirius does not have, that Sirius has never had; this is yours, and this is special). You think of Snape and the mockery he is trying to make of the institution that has shaped you, an offensive misappropriation of your beliefs as a vessel through which he can practice the Dark Arts under the guise of the cause, because that's all Snape really likes, darkness, not loyalty or legacy or pride. All those cracks in your spirit refill with righteous anger, and you're eager to show him how it's really done, to show all of them how it's really done.

(Perhaps when all this is over, you won't even have to worry about finding a wife.)

You roll up the sleeve of your robe and study your forearm, watching as the muscles flex and strain against your smooth, clean skin, ready to be stained with sacred ink.

You look up at Greengrass and grin, bright and charming (you aren't much like Sirius in any respect, for which you pride yourself, but this is something you two share, this grin, predatory and sweet; you keep it tucked away as best you can, because you've been told it makes you look remarkably like your brother, and sometimes, when you let it out, wild and unbroken and ready to run, dangerous, a survivor, mercurial and kind, you feel remarkably like your brother, too).

"Yes," you tell her, you tell them all. "Yes, I am."

End Notes

my faves r problematic :(

(when I was younger I super duper idealized Regulus and I tried to turn him into a tragic anti-hero who didn't want to do bad things but simply had no choice (I tried to make him Draco) so in writing this I wanted to re-imagine him in my mind as something closer to what he probably was: someone who agreed with the Death Eater ideology and only after getting far enough in the organization to recognize the horrors of genocide did he get scared and back out)

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