

Title: Secrets and Lies
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Summary: Wormtail journeys to find the Dark Lord in Albania and finds more than he bargained for.

Timeframe: After Pettigrew escapes in Book 3
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Category: The Untold Story
Warnings: Extreme Evil Violence, Death of a Child
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Secrets and Lies

Chapter 1 -- The End of the Beginning

Peter Pettigrew, nicknamed Wormtail by his closest school friends, was hiding in the shadows of the Potter's front garden, watching their house... and waiting.

He had transformed into his Animagus form, a common gray rat, after Apparating outside Godric's Hollow early on Halloween. He did not want anyone to know he was there. He knew his new master -- Lord Voldemort, the Dark Lord -- would be coming later to murder little Harry Potter. The poor child was only a baby, just over a year old.

But Wormtail knew that not only the boy, but his parents would surely die too -- fighting to save their son. There was no other possible outcome. The Dark Lord was simply too powerful.

He wondered why was he here? Was it guilt or just morbid curiosity?

Wormtail had betrayed his long-time school friend, James, and his beautiful wife, Lily by revealing their secret location to his master. He really did not want any of them to die. Why could they not realize, as he had, that the Dark Lord was destined to win the wizarding war? But then, what parents would willingly sacrifice their child to survive?

Wormtail just had to accept that they were *doomed and fated* -- by a prophecy -- to eventually succumb. That meant it was not so very terrible to make it happen sooner rather than later -- especially if it would help him prove his loyalty to his new master.

'Why does it have to be so *hard* for traitors to prove their new allegiance?' he asked himself with genuine self-pity.

What a stroke of luck it had been for James to pick him as Secret Keeper of the Fidelius Charm that protected their home. He and everyone else had expected James to pick Sirius, his closest school friend -- the two had been like brothers. Wormtail had rushed to inform the Dark Lord as soon as he was able to get away. He had nearly wet himself with excitement. Delivering Harry Potter to the Dark Lord would assure him a trusted place at his side in the new order.

Wormtail heard voices from the house -- cheerful, loving voices, James' and Lilly's -- though he could not make out any of the words. The curtains to the lounge were open and light from the room illuminated the garden. But Wormtail was too low and too hidden to see anything. Then the slight sound of a cloak brushing the ground caught his attention. There was a hooded figure at the gate.

No mistaking it, Lord Voldemort had come.

The Dark Lord did not hesitate. His wand in hand, he moved swiftly through the gate up the garden path to the front door. He briefly turned his head to look through the lounge window. Then the front door was blown open and he strode into the house.

Wormtail could not see anything going on inside, but he heard shouting and saw a burst of green light. A small orange cat streaked out the front door, down the garden path and out the gate.

After a few seconds, he heard more shouting, but this time it was a woman pleading, followed by a scream silenced by another burst of green light. Wormtail was momentarily concerned that the noise would attract the attention of the neighbors, but then realized the Fidelius Charm would block it.

A moment later, there was a third burst of green light, followed instantaneously by a tremendous and dazzling magical explosion which blew out all the windows and a huge section of the roof, plunging the house into darkness. Wormtail froze in shock and was lucky not to be crushed by the debris raining down into the garden.

Dogs immediately began barking. Wormtail heard people shouting from nearby houses. They had clearly heard it. Had the Fidelius Charm broken or was the explosion so loud or magical it exceeded the charm's normal limits? Once the debris had stopped falling, there were no more sounds coming from the house.

At least several minutes passed, but no one had come through the gate. Wormtail could no longer hear anyone talking out in the lane and the dogs had stopped barking.

Where was the Dark Lord? Why was he taking so long? Did he Disapparate from inside the house? But that should not be possible with the protections Dumbledore and the Order of the Phoenix had placed on the house.

Wormtail desperately wanted to run away, but he had to find out what happened so he could decide what best to do. He finally made up his mind and left his hiding place. He scurried through the open front door. James Potter was lying dead in the hallway. The house was dark. Only moonlight was coming through the blown-out windows. Wormtail quickly climbed the stairs and entered the upstairs hallway. One bedroom had its door blasted off its hinges. Wormtail cautiously entered and found Lilly also lying dead. Behind her was a baby crib. He leapt up into it through the bars.

The boy was lying very still on his back -- dead too. No! -- *not* dead. His chest was moving. He was breathing -- *alive!*

In amazement, Wormtail looked closer. The boy appeared to be unconscious, apparently stunned, and with a bleeding cut on his forehead. How was this possible? Wormtail looked around the room.

The room was covered in debris, a combination of wood splinters, plaster dust, and, to his surprise, black ashes. The ash was everywhere but without any sign of a fire. The wall of the bedroom next the door was strangely streaked with what looked like blast marks. But there was a large, undamaged section, roughly man-shaped, that looked as if something had protected it from the blast. The ceiling and the roof above in the half of the room nearest the door were gone. The stars were visible.

Wormtail jumped down from the crib onto the floor.

Where was the Dark Lord? There were no human footprints in the dust and ash.

Wormtail transformed back into his human form.

He softly called out, "My Lord?" He paused; there was silence. Then he gathered his remaining courage and shouted, "MY LORD!" There was still no answer.

What could have happened? What should he do now? What about the boy? The urge to run and hide had been building inside him and finally overwhelmed him.

He must run and hide so he could think.

Just as he was about to transform back into a rat, he saw it -- a wand sticking out of the debris. He knew the wand. It was, unmistakably, the Dark Lord's wand.

Wormtail hesitated and looked around quickly as if making sure he was not being watched. Then he seized the wand and stepped into the hall. He used an Obliteration Charm to cover his footprints in the bedroom, both human *and* rat.

Then he dashed down the stairs -- but not back to the lane. Instead, he ran through the kitchen and into the back garden. He paused to check the neighboring gardens, which were clear. He was about to jump the wall when he heard two voices in the front hallway. Wormtail knew those voices.

"Oh, dear me. It's James, Albus." That was Bathilda Bagshot. She was a family friend of the Potters, always bringing over sweet treats. They had insisted she be included in the Fidelius Charm.

"There is nothing we can do for him, Bathilda. I must find Lilly and Harry. Please wait at the gate; I asked Hagrid to come as soon as possible. Call me when he arrives." That was Albus Dumbledore and even more reason for Wormtail to get away quickly.

Wormtail quietly climbed over the garden wall and then over several more going from house to house to get away from the Potter's. Finally, he made his way to back to the spot outside Godric's Hollow where he had hidden his own wand. After retrieving it, he Disapparated with a loud crack.

All this time his mind had been working furiously, 'The Dark Lord is *gone!* How could this *be?* This is a *disaster!* Now *both* the Death Eaters and the Order of the Phoenix will hunt me. I must *hide, hide, hide!* ...and then *think.*'

But the ghost of a plan to save his neck was already starting to form inside his conniving head.

'The most important thing I have to do,' he thought to himself, 'is hide the Dark Lord's wand... just in case.'

Chapter 2 -- Twelve Years Later: Escape

Pettigrew had dived for Lupin's dropped wand...

'Expelliarmus!' Harry yelled, pointing his own wand at Pettigrew; Lupin's wand flew high in the air and out of sight.

Too late. Pettigrew had transformed. Harry saw his bald tail ... and heard him scurrying through the grass.

Pettigrew disappeared into the bushes and continued to run as fast as he could until he was among the dark trees of the Forbidden Forest. Then he stopped to catch his breath.

Wormtail cursed them. '*Damn them all!*' They were going to turn him over to the Dementors -- Potter and the others, even the Weasley brat. So much for his loyalty to such a wonderful pet!

There was no going back now; they know. He must finally seek out the Dark Lord... but where? Suddenly, it came to him -- Albania. He had overheard them say Albania more than once. Albania! Why could it not be somewhere closer, somewhere easy, like... Cornwall? He needed more information, and he knew how and where to get it.

Wormtail reluctantly went to live once again among the creatures of his Animagus form -- rats. However, Wormtail never really liked real rats. He did not have a true rat-like personality, only a rat-like human face.

Rats are actually friendly and gregarious -- and they love to talk. They will tell you their life story (and the life story of every other rat they have ever met) when they first meet you... if you let them. Wormtail had to be very rude to his fellow rats to get the information he needed without wasting hours listening to life stories.

Wormtail quickly learned there was a far-away place that rats avoided. Not all the English rats had heard of it, so it had the sense of a mythic tale rather than local news. It was a *dark* place. Not dark in the literal sense, which to rats means friendly and welcoming, but dark in the figurative sense, which to rats (and humans) means deadly and to be avoided -- a place where the Dark Lord might be hiding.

Rats are very good at direction, but terrible at distance. Anything over a hundred yards is far away and anything less is in the neighborhood.

Because Albania was his destination, he had a much smaller search area than every square inch of land on earth. But Albania was still very far away, especially for a rat, and still very big. He did not want to risk traveling in his human form until he was far from England. He thought stowing away on a ship would be the safest and easiest way to get to Albania.

The rats all said traveling by sea was the best way to get anywhere very far away, so he went to Southampton, checked the freighter schedules, and talked to the local dock rats. They all recommended one particular ship for the trip to Albania as the most rat friendly ship ever. And he was in luck, it was in port and ready to sail. He was very soon on his way.

The sea voyage took a week, but it seemed much, much longer. He thought if he only had a week to live, a sea voyage like this one would make it seem like an eternity. It was certainly safer than traveling by land across Europe, but he was seasick the whole time.

The noisy rusty old cargo ship the rats had highly recommended seemed to stop at every stinking port in the Mediterranean before reaching Albania. Oh, the rats loved it -- delectable international rat cuisine at every stop; rat romance in every port; bilge water swimming pool; and steam engine room saunas every day; not to mention the throbbing engine vibrating you to sleep every night. In other words -- rat paradise. But not so for an *Animagus* rat, at least one which had always enjoyed *human* comforts.

Chapter 3 -- Hide and Seek

The ship finally docked in Sarande, Albania. The local Albanian rats unfailingly continued to guide his path. Now, he rarely came across a rat that had not heard of "*the dark place*." Here it was not a myth; it was *real*. It gave Wormtail his first true hope that he would find his master.

Wormtail would get the general direction from a few local rats and then wait until night, transform to human form, and Apparate a few miles in the specified direction, then repeat the process.

It was extremely tedious, but he finally determined there was a roughly circular area about four miles across in a very rugged forested area near the Macedonian border that the rats avoided like the plague -- no pun intended.

Wormtail started to search the area and soon realized the enormity of this task on foot -- even as a human, much less a rat. The rats closest to the dark place reported finding dead rats with no visible signs of distress -- and worse.

Sometimes, though very rarely, they encountered deranged rats that staggered aimlessly or in circles, unable to communicate, eat or drink. This frightened them the most. Rats are *always* a little scared in the back of their minds; it keeps them wary and on their toes. However, older rats over time became numb to the extra danger of the dark place and would wander into it while doing their ordinary ratty things. So, mysteriously dead and or deranged rats were still showing up on the edge of the dark place even a dozen years after it had started.

Despite the size of the task, Wormtail continued searching systematically until he realized that dead or deranged rats were being found in *many* different locations near the boundary. His master was constantly moving, in other words -- *hunting*. But why rats? So, after a week of searching, Wormtail finally just picked a comfortable spot on the edge of the dark place and waited -- as a rat.

It happened without warning. A dark shadow penetrated his mind -- and paused, with what Wormtail understood to be a sense of surprise -- though no words were spoken. He was totally powerless to move, but could still think.

A questioning voice popped into his head. 'Wormtail?' It came with a sense of disappointment.

He could not speak, but he could think a response. 'Is that you, My Lord?'

A cold and merciless voice answered in his head, 'Who else could it be? ...You worthless excuse for a wizard... You have sought me across an ocean; yet you think someone else could possess you as I have?'

Wormtail mentally cowered, 'My Lord, I never doubted you.'

Voldemort's anger persisted as he railed, 'And yet it is *twelve* years that I have waited for any of my Death Eaters to find me. And at long last, who is it but the *traitor* from the Order of the Phoenix, the least trustworthy of my servants, whom Lord Voldemort finds. I should *kill* you now.' His anger was intense.

'No, My Lord. Please!' begged Wormtail. 'I have brought you your wand.'

There was another pause. Then Voldemort said contemptuously, 'I would have expected *nothing* less.'

At this, Wormtail could not help himself. He thought-spoke in the most subservient tone he could muster, 'Please, My Lord... an Animagus can only transform with simple personal possessions, like clothing. His wand and other magical objects will fall away and not transform with him. I don't know why; it's just the way the magic works. To bring your wand to you, I had to carry it in my teeth as a rat or transform back into human form, which was *very* risky. I lost *my* wand years ago when I went into hiding.'

'Liar!' Voldemort hissed. 'I see in your mind you left your wand behind when you faked your own death. If you thought I would be impressed by your *hard work* to bring me my wand, you are mistaken. You do not *think*, Wormtail; you are a witless *fool*,' Voldemort said contemptuously. 'You could have easily Imperiused a Muggle to accompany you on the journey and carry my wand. Then I would have had it *and* a human body to make use of.'

But then Wormtail felt from his master a surprisingly thoughtful tone and without the anger or contempt, 'Unfortunately, I have need of your *services*. Your *death* will have to wait. Perhaps you can prove useful enough to earn a reprieve.'

Wormtail thought quickly, pleading, 'Oh yes, My Lord. I will serve you faithfully. I swear. I swear.'

'Enough!' Voldemort commanded and Wormtail's mind was struck dumb so he could not voice his thoughts. 'I will tell you when I want you to think out loud from now on.'

Wormtail could tell Voldemort was exploring his mind and body. After some time, Voldemort spoke again. 'You are even more worthless than I imagined. Framing Sirius Black was clever, but then you *lived* with *blood traitors* as a rat for *twelve years* while I remained in need. You *knew* I was alive because you found and hid my wand, but you did not come for me -- until now.'

Wormtail could sense the Dark Lord's anger rising again and became more fearful.

Voldemort must have sensed it because he calmed himself again and continued, 'I understand your fear that the other Death Eaters would think you had betrayed me. It would have been a reasonable assumption. But you are here and they are not, regardless of your true motivations -- which I know better than you. What I find most curious, however, is how your memories of the so-called '*boy who lived*' show him to be completely unremarkable. Yet, how was he able to survive my killing curse as a baby and two years ago burn Quirrell's flesh without a wand just by his touch?'

There was a short pause, then he continued, 'And what is this I see about the Chamber of Secrets?' Voldemort's tone turned ominous; 'Lucius will *pay* for his disobedience.' He then changed abruptly to a matter-of-fact tone. 'I will need to ponder on all of this... but later. Enough! There are more important things to deal with now.'

Wormtail expected Voldemort to continue, but he did not for some time. He assumed he was deep in thought.

Finally, Voldemort spoke again, this time in a self-amused tone, 'You are quite fortunate that I thought you were a rat. I used only the most trivial amount of power in possessing you -- just the amount needed to control an ordinary rat without killing it. If I had used the power needed to possess a *man*, it would have killed you in your rat form. When I possessed you, I immediately knew 'this is no rat.' Now I will tell you what you are going to do.'

It was a good thing Wormtail's ability to think-speak was temporarily silenced by Voldemort, because he could not stop thinking, 'You're the lucky one... Where would you be if I had not come to find you?'

Chapter 4 -- Possessed

Voldemort gave Wormtail, as a rat, instructions to transform back into a man and then released him from possession.

Wormtail transformed as instructed and then Voldemort possessed him again -- but not full possession where Wormtail had no memory of being possessed, but where he could 'supervise' Wormtail, and they could communicate. "This is how I controlled Quirrell," he explained.

"Now, pick up my wand, Wormtail," instructed Voldemort. It was laying on the ground nearby. Voldemort knew Wormtail had told the truth about it. "Now, walk uphill... deeper into the forest... until I tell you to stop."

Voldemort could take full possession of Wormtail if he needed to, but only for brief periods, because, apparently, he was weak from years of possessing lesser creatures. But in possessing a human, Voldemort's strength would begin to grow again.

Wormtail learned that Voldemort, while in hiding, had preferred to possess snakes. But for some reason, they did not live as long as the small mammals of the forest. Larger mammals, like deer and lynx, which would seem better candidates, were surprisingly harder to control and went insane very quickly.

Voldemort currently had a female snake, an Adder, with which he had developed a strange affinity. She was only about two feet long, light brown and with a striking dark zigzag stripe pattern running down the length of her body. Voldemort had named it Nagini. It seemed to like being possessed, because it did not try to leave whenever Voldemort stopped possessing it. Voldemort had begun to hunt and possess rats just to feed her. This had apparently gone on for the last two years -- after Voldemort had abandoned Quirrell to his fate and returned to Albania.

Wormtail suspected that the relationship with Nagini had helped Voldemort retain his sanity after his failure with Quirrell. Voldemort avoided possessing Nagini too much because he did not want to harm her; so, he had continued to possess small mammals most of the time. Nagini would not attack the possessed animals without permission.

When Nagini needed feeding, they would play games.

In one game, Voldemort would have the doomed animal perform a little dance in front of the snake and then dart away from its strike. Because Voldemort had unnatural control of the animal, he could force it to react faster than normal. This would play out until the poor animal's muscles were exhausted and the snake

prevailed. Voldemort would then leap from possessing the animal to possessing Nagini and enjoy the feeding.

In another game, Voldemort would deliver a dazed and damaged animal nearby, then possess Nagini and hunt it down. Some got away, not that they were lucky. Often, possessed animals were completely spent before Nagini was hungry. These were simply left for dead or died when Voldemort stopped possessing them.

Voldemort did not just tell this to Wormtail -- he showed him. Voldemort clearly delighted in it. And he continued doing it even after possession of Wormtail became the norm.

Voldemort said he continued to possess Nagini to avoid damaging Wormtail -- that if he possessed him too much, he would end up dying as Quirrell had when Voldemort abandoned him. Wormtail assumed it was true since it had kept Nagini alive. However, he suspected the real reason was the Dark Lord liked the pathetic killing games -- because he had become *unhinged* after twelve years in hiding, especially after his failure with Quirrell two years before.

After about two weeks, Voldemort rarely 'talked' with Wormtail anymore. Voldemort usually took full possession of him, and Wormtail would not remember anything afterwards. Wormtail would find things had changed when Voldemort stopped possessing him. There was now a crude 'camp' of sorts that provided Wormtail some shelter from the elements and a wood-fueled fire to stay warm. It had taken very loud stomach grumbings from Wormtail for Voldemort to realize that he, like Nagini, also needed to eat. Voldemort collected additional small animals for Wormtail, but he would not let Wormtail out of his presence.

Voldemort had hidden his wand from Wormtail. Wormtail assumed Voldemort used his wand when he possessed him and then hid it again before leaving him. He clearly did not want Wormtail using his wand.

'You lack self-discipline, Wormtail,' Voldemort said at last. 'I shall not risk what I have gained... not yet. Aurors from the Ministry of Magic still search for me in these woods. I saw two of them quite recently. They are always in pairs, so I have not dared try to possess one of them, especially in my current state. Though with you, I am getting stronger every day.'

Voldemort remained silent for at least a minute. Wormtail had almost learned not to attempt thought-speech unless Voldemort asked him a question... though sometimes he just could not help himself.

Finally, Voldemort continued. "I am in need of a body of my own. I cannot think properly when I possess animals. I am certain I am forgetting things when I return to Nagini -- things that I have planned while possessing you. I am getting

stronger now, having a human to possess, so the problem is diminishing... but it remains a problem. And Lord Voldemort does not like *problems*.'

There was another long pause.

'The problem is *you*, Wormtail. You are supposed to be dead. I cannot walk around using you as my host. You could alter your appearance somewhat, but it would not withstand a probity probe or the close inspection of Aurors. It also sacrifices the power of *two*. We are *two* dark wizards but, at present, have only *one* body and *one* wand – ignoring, for arguments sake, the miserable cowardly wizard you are.' These last words were said with disgust.

'Nonetheless, *two* dark wizards, with *two* bodies, and *two* wands, using cunning, stealth and surprise -- but particularly with Lord Voldemort as one of the wizards, even in a diminished capacity -- would be more than a match for a pair of Ministry Aurors. So, the first priority must be to create a body...'

Voldemort paused yet again. This puzzled Wormtail. He had no sense of what the Dark Lord was thinking or feeling; he could completely hide his emotions when he wanted to.

After a minute, Wormtail risked continuing. 'Please, My Lord. There is a Muggle inn a few miles away in the valley below. I passed it during my travels here. We could go there and get a body for you to use...'

'NO!' The word exploded in Wormtail's mind. He cowered miserably.

'You understand so little,' said Voldemort. His disdain was obvious. 'Possession is not the same as the Imperius Curse. The ability to perform magic is greatly diminished. Magic is performed by a wizard... using his *own* magical abilities... channeled by his *will*... through his *wand*.' Voldemort emphasized it by pausing between each phrase. 'When you *fully* possess a wizard, you cannot make him channel his own magical abilities, because they are suppressed along with his will. The fully possessed wizard is like a puppet, rather than a slave. You think I, Lord Voldemort, prepared this miserable pathetic camp using your magic? I used your muscle and sweat.'

'Please, My Lord. I could have easily done it for you if you had let me use your wand...' Wormtail had difficulty remaining silent when he thought he could ingratiate himself with the Dark Lord.

'Silence, you worm. I do not trust you with any wand, much less *my* wand, and...'

there was a slight hesitation, 'I need to 'exercise' my *mind* by controlling your body to increase my strength.'

There was another long pause.

If finally occurred to Wormtail that the Dark Lord was not able to sustain his focus on thought-speech for more than a minute and needed to rest for a while before he could continue. He supposed the Dark Lord was aware of this. He had admitted to memory lapses after returning to Nagini. Maybe this was another symptom of his weakness.

Voldemort continued, 'However, Lord Voldemort is no *ordinary* wizard. As you have witnessed, I can perform complex magic of the mind without a wand, including Legilimency, which when combined with my power of possession, is more than enough to sustain me. I can be *you*, Wormtail, better than you can be as yourself -- *except* to use a wand to perform magic. To do that, I must relinquish full control of your mind and body and act only as an observer. That is how I used Quirrell. He was *twice* the wizard you are, and *he* failed me. So, I will not let *you* take *us* into that inn and risk another failure. I do not *trust* you. DO YOU UNDERSTAND LORD VOLDEMORT, Wormtail?'

'Yes, My Lord,' Wormtail whimpered.

Satisfied, Voldemort concluded, 'We must be *patient* and wait for a *solitary* traveler. But in the meantime...'

An idea suddenly came to Wormtail, and he thought-spoke excitedly, interrupting his master. 'Please, My Lord! Summon the other Death Eaters using the Dark Mark on my arm!'

This pause was the longest yet before Voldemort spoke.

His tone was one of extreme exasperation. 'Wormtail, I was far too generous in calling you witless. Have you not listened to anything I have just told you? *I* must touch your Dark Mark to summon the Death Eaters. *I* have no body. And I have just told you I cannot use your body to perform magic. You cannot summon the Death Eaters on your own. If *you* touch your mark, you summon *me*. And if you have looked at your mark, you will see it is a mere shadow. Only when I have regained a body and my full strength will the mark be blood red again. Only then will it turn black when I summon my Death Eaters, whom, I'm sure, will be most happy to see *you*.'

Wormtail could imagine Voldemort smiling sarcastically as he said it.

'Yes, My Lord. Sorry, My Lord,' thought Wormtail with genuine embarrassment.

But he had learned that the Dark Lord was not yet able to use his wand. If Wormtail could find it, *he* could use it....

'Now listen and do not speak again, Wormtail,' commanded Voldemort. 'As I was saying... in the meantime, Lord Voldemort is going to teach you the magic necessary to restore me to my body.'

Wormtail quivered with excitement -- thoughts of finding his master's wand set aside.

Chapter 5 -- Hunting

Due to the frequency that Voldemort was switching between possession of Wormtail, Nagini, and prey animals, Wormtail occasionally noticed something in the air, a slight ripple, a very subtle translucent 'shadow' -- like almost intangible smoke. He saw it when the sunlight occasionally streaked through the dense trees at just the right angle. Whatever it was would slightly disturb the dust motes suspended in the light beams.

Wormtail supposed this 'shadow' was what remained of the Dark Lord -- his essential spirit -- and he marveled at the great magical power that something so ethereal still possessed. If he could help the Dark Lord regain full power, he was sure the Dark Lord would greatly reward him.

Wormtail decided he would do anything necessary to earn the Dark Lord's approval... no, not approval -- *rewards*. Wormtail was only interested in rewards and benefits. And he was not foolish enough to expect any gratitude from the Dark Lord, who expected only abject loyalty and self-sacrifice from his followers.

Voldemort began to teach Wormtail the incantation that would create a rudimentary near-human body, strong enough to travel. This body would later be used as the basis for true re-birth. It was an extremely long and complex incantation, with many words Wormtail had never heard before and did not understand. Voldemort had him repeat it over and over for hours, but Wormtail would often make mistakes -- mispronounce words or forget whole lines.

Once, Wormtail tried to recite it to the tune of a popular song by Celestina Warbeck. This infuriated Voldemort, and he physically punished Wormtail for the first time since they had reunited.

'You dare to mock my Dark Magic!' was all Voldemort said. He took full possession of Wormtail and put his hand over the campfire until it blistered. Wormtail was in extreme pain for several days, but Voldemort did not allow him to treat it.

A month passed. Voldemort was stronger now. He could possess Wormtail for an entire day without tiring. The long pauses between statements were gone. It was

harder on Wormtail, but Voldemort always left him every day to prevent the 'possession wasting' effects that Quirrell had suffered.

Wormtail concentrated as he never had before and finally learned the incantation. Voldemort made him recite it one hundred times in a row without error before he was satisfied.

Voldemort declared, "Now that you have finally learned the incantation, Wormtail, we need to obtain two essential potion ingredients: the venom of a snake, which we have, and unicorn blood, which we do not. But fortunately, there are unicorns in this forest. Nagini has told me. Using her help, we will find one and you will kill it. I cannot possess a unicorn. Their magic protects them from possession and many spells, but *not* the killing curse."

Wormtail perked up with excitement.

"Yes, Wormtail. You will be permitted to use Lord Voldemort's wand... *temporarily*. Do not dare think you have earned it. This is an expedient exception."

Nagini guided them in the hunt. It was much easier than Wormtail had expected - - nothing more than a short hike that same afternoon. He used the Dark Lord's wand to magically clear a path through the thick woods. However, he did not like having to walk with a three-foot-long poisonous Adder on his shoulders curled around his neck. The damn thing kept flicking his ear with its tongue. His irritation amused the Dark Lord.

They found a solitary male unicorn drinking from a stream. It was breathtakingly beautiful, but Wormtail enjoyed killing it just the same. Voldemort then had him conjure two small vials. He filled them with unicorn blood. So little... Wormtail supposed he could have stunned it, or bound it, and got the blood without killing it, but no matter... It would provide food for many other forest creatures -- the cycle of life, he thought airily.

When they returned to camp, Voldemort seemed to be in a good mood. He said, 'Wormtail, you did not make any serious blunders today. Lord Voldemort is generous. You may make a magical fire with my wand before I take it away.'

'Thank you, My Lord, thank you.' Wormtail wasted no time in completing the task. He did not want the Dark Lord to change his mind. Given his apparent good mood, Wormtail asked, 'When shall you have me perform the incantation, My Lord?'

'Even now, if you offer your body as the living sacrifice,' suggested Voldemort.

'My body... My Lord?' Wormtail's voice quavered nervously.

'You have memorized the incantation but apparently never listened to it. The last line ... *'and infuse this living sacrifice with the elixirs of death and of life to purge what had existed before and restore what still exists to being'*... Remember?' Voldemort taunted. 'But think, you fool. The living sacrifice has to be killed and then brought back to life. How can you perform a deadly incantation on yourself? And why would I want to have any part of your body as my being? You disgust me.'

Wormtail did not answer.

'Do not to worry, Wormtail. As I have told you, I need *two* dark wizards. Even in my restored body, I will not be fit to care for myself or travel alone. Apparition will be out of the question, as will use of a Portkey, Floo Powder, or other magical transport. It is unfortunate the other dark wizard happens to be you -- you hardly count as a full wizard. Even Lord Voldemort does not have the power to make you competent -- but there is no doubt Lord Voldemort counts as more than one wizard, even in a greatly weakened state. So now... we wait for our lonely traveler.'

And so they waited, and waited. Another month went by. Wormtail concluded Voldemort had learned patience during his exiles. And one would think Wormtail would have learned the same -- having lived as a pet rat for twelve years. However, living as a pet rat was *comfortable* -- always warm, never hungry, sleeping in comfort. Living with the Dark Lord -- in this primitive camp, in a dark forest, cold and hungry, a constant target of torment and abuse -- was misery.

Wormtail began to wonder if pairs of Aurors actually *were* still looking for the Dark Lord, or if it were just an excuse. Because Voldemort never used Wormtail to search for travelers, lonely or otherwise.

After just over two months with the Dark Lord, Wormtail decided he had to act on his own.

Chapter 6 -- Risky Business

Wormtail waited for the right moment. Voldemort was possessing Nagini while it was hunting a captured rat. This rat had been more difficult than usual and the snake had moved beyond the campfire light into the shadows of the nearby trees.

After a while, Wormtail could not hear them anymore. He was not exactly sure how far away he needed to be so the Dark Lord could not sense where he was and possess him. He also did not know for sure how fast the Dark Lord could move in spirit form. But he did know how fast the snake moved and it had to be at least a minute away. So, he took the chance.

Wormtail moved quickly into the woods in the opposite direction. Once out of the range of the firelight, he ran. He figured that by the time Nagini and the Dark Lord had captured and eaten the rat, then returned to the camp, he would be at least a mile away. He prayed that was far enough for Lord Voldemort to be unable to sense him and track him down. If not, it would mean, at the very least, slow torture and death.

It was not easy to run in the dark, rugged forest. He was as careful as possible, but he had not been able to wait for a moonlit night. He kept running into branches and tripping on tree roots. His running was really fast-walking with his arms out in front of his face to avoid the constant whipping of branches. If he had been a more accomplished wizard, he might have tried to Disapparate, but he had never been able to do it without having a wand.

When he was a rat, he had not noticed how thick the forest was. These woods were quite thick, and it was the main reason he did not think a lonely traveler was ever going to happen along. He now doubted the Dark Lord had ever seen *any* Aurors in the forest at all.

Wormtail continued walking. He could not tell direction in the dark, but he knew he just needed to go downhill to eventually get to the valley where the Muggle inn was. That was his destination.

He was not running away; he was... Muggle hunting.

Chapter 7 -- Fair Fortune

The Muggle inn was only five miles from the camp in the forest, but it took Wormtail all night to get there. He had no wand, no money, and he really did not have a plan. He figured he would play it by ear. Persuading a Muggle to walk back with him into the forest was not going to be easy. And if he had to kidnap a Muggle, even a child, and have to march it, or worse, *carry* it all the way back... It seemed impossible.

He considered spinning a story about an injured companion, but that would prompt a rescue team. He thought about this as he cleaned himself up in a stream near the small and very old country inn, which stood set back just into the edge of forest beside the intersection of two dirt roads bisecting the valley.

It was breakfast time. He could smell it. It made his stomach ache for real food. Rats and other vermin, maybe a lean rabbit now and then, was all he had eaten since finding the Dark Lord. However, he decided to wait and observe.

A horse drawn cart with several farm hands arrived for breakfast. A middle-age man and woman, presumably the landlords, went in and out the back door

throughout the day doing inn work. There was a small lorry parked in back. There was also an old car parked in front. After the farm hands left, another middle-aged couple came out the front door with luggage, got in the car and drove off.

It was not looking good. There did not seem to be anyone else there and he doubted he could risk going after the either of the landlords unless one of them left in the lorry. So, he waited and waited. He waited all day, and it finally paid off, but not as he might have expected.

As evening approached, people began to arrive in numbers, mostly couples, but some singles -- all ages, from young adults to old folks -- on foot, bicycles, farm carts, and cars. Wormtail concluded the inn must be the local hot spot. There were at least thirty people. The place must be packed -- the better to avoid attracting attention to himself.

Just as he was about to move from his hiding place in the forest to the inn door, no more than fifty feet away, an old bus came rumbling up. It stopped and let off a single passenger with a small traveling bag.

Wormtail started, amazed. He could not believe it. What an incredible stroke of luck! It was Bertha Jorkins, an old Hogwarts classmate a couple of years ahead of him, but now, like himself, much older and a *lot* plumper.

He knew immediately what he would do.

Chapter 8 -- Bertha Jorkins

Bertha got off the old Muggle bus carrying her paisley carpet travel bag. The passengers stared after her as the bus started up and continued on its route. She was oddly dressed. She was wearing a very short black sequined cocktail dress over too large tan riding pants with stirrups, which did not work very well with the yellow shower flip-flops she had on. One of the stirrups was flapping behind the heel of her foot and the pant leg was riding up noticeably.

Bertha was looking around with some confusion. This place did not look anything like the place in the brochure. She could not remember why she had gone on vacation in the first place, but she assumed it had been to see her relatives. She had just visited her cousin up north and was on her way to visit her aunt.

Just as she had decided to go into the inn, a squat little man in dirty robes came hurrying around the corner of the inn and approached her in a subservient manor and said in a croaky voice, "May I take yer bag, madam?"

She gaped at him and then grimaced. He smelled bad and had many little cuts and scrapes on his face and hands. But he was wearing *wizard* robes. Curious,

she looked closer at the man. Recognition dawned on her face. "Peter? Peter Pettigrew?"

The bowing man looked up into her face. "Ma'am? My name is Vern. No last name."

"No, no, no!" she exclaimed. "You are Peter Pettigrew. I know you. We went to school together at Hogwarts. And you're... dead..." The last word trailed off.

"Don't know what yer talking about, misses. Not dead. Been here abouts now... least ten years. Can't remember nothin' before. Amnesias they say," Wormtail croaked with a laugh, and then said, "Let me take yer bag." And he grabbed it from her.

Only slightly taken aback, Bertha exclaimed enthusiastically. "Oh, this is amazing! What a tale I have to tell you! You won't believe it! Your life is going to completely change!" She made for the front door to the inn, but Vern-Peter blocked her way and said, "Door's broken. Need to go in round back." He turned and she followed him around the side of the inn into the nearby trees.

She could not see it, but Wormtail had a huge, evil grin on his face.

Chapter 9 -- Back to Camp

Voldemort was raging, as he had not raged in years. 'BETRAYED!' he screamed over and over. 'BETRAYED!'

Voldemort remained as spirit by the campfire. The sun was setting. It had been almost a full day since Wormtail's betrayal. When he had discovered Wormtail missing he had thought aloud, 'Surely not.' But when Wormtail had not returned from any still inexcusable short foray away from camp, Voldemort's rage had exploded.

He left Nagini so he could move faster and find the miserable, worthless traitor. He searched all night. He savagely killed every animal he came across, but he did not find Wormtail.

Finally, he felt a greater need and returned to Nagini and the camp. But Nagini did not like his continued raging, so he had left her mind and she had long since slithered away into the woods.

Voldemort seethed. He imagined every excruciating torture he would have Wormtail inflict on himself until he died. He would make it last for days... weeks, if he could manage it.

Suddenly, there was a loud crack by the campfire. Two human forms appeared illuminated by the fire -- Wormtail... and *another*.

Wormtail instantly thought-spoke in his mind and simultaneously shouted at the top of his lungs, "DO NOT KILL ME, MY LORD! I HAVE BROUGHT WHAT YOU SEEK!"

This momentarily surprised Voldemort, who was just about to possess Wormtail and have him cast himself into the fire. And while he nonetheless swiftly possessed Wormtail, he did *not* have him cast himself into the fire. Instead, he paused and looked into Wormtail's mind.

Voldemort smiled to himself and thought with growing excitement, 'Well, well, *well*.'

Chapter 10 -- Mind Games

Voldemort allowed Wormtail to speak.

Wormtail could hardly contain himself. He dropped Bertha's traveling bag to the ground and spoke very rapidly. "My Lord, I walked to the inn and waited outside. I couldn't believe it, but Bertha Jorkins showed up. I tricked her into following me into the woods and knocked her out with a rock. I took her wand, used the Imperius Curse on her, and then used side-along Apparition to bring her to you. I didn't *betray* you, My Lord; I brought you your *living sacrifice*." He stopped to catch his breath and was about to resume, when Voldemort cut him off.

'I know all this. I have seen it in your mind. Who is Bertha Jorkins?' asked Voldemort.

Wormtail answered eagerly, "She is an old Hogwarts classmate..."

Voldemort again cut him off, this time more impatiently. 'I know this. What does she do now?'

"Sorry, My Lord. She works in the Ministry. I don't know her exact job, but I think she works for Ludo Bagman in the Department of Magical Games and Sports and..."

Voldemort cut in, 'That is all I need to know.'

But Wormtail continued, "My Lord, now we have two wands!" holding out Bertha's wand to no one, since Voldemort was in his mind.

Voldemort said derisively, 'Wormtail, you have the unique ability to make the obvious apparent.'

Wormtail thought he had just received a compliment and gushed, "Thank you, My Lord."

Voldemort ignored him. Then he said malevolently, 'Let me see what to make of this Ministry witch...'

Wormtail sensed his release from possession. He turned to look at Bertha, who had continued to stand motionless next to him after they had Apparated next to the campfire. She was still under his Imperius Curse, which, interestingly, had not broken when Voldemort had possessed him. He assumed Voldemort now possessed her.

There was tension in Bertha's jaw and her hands were clenched. Then suddenly, she screamed -- a pitiful, anguished scream that went on and on, as if she were being burned alive. But she did not move.

Wormtail was completely unnerved. He staggered and fell to the ground. He dropped Bertha's wand and put his fingers in his ears. The screaming continued. Wormtail crawled away as far into the woods as he dared and crouched down behind a tree. With his fingers back in his hears, he tried loud humming, talking to himself, thinking maths -- anything to distract himself -- but he could not cut off the sound of the screaming. It went on and on. It was horrible. He wept. Only after what seemed an eternity, he fainted.

Voldemort was indeed possessing Bertha Jorkins. He had never encountered such a challenge. There was... resistance. There were... barriers. But this stupid witch was clearly not capable of either. It was obvious that another witch or wizard, with considerable power, perhaps using too much, had tampered with her memory. He laughed. No memory charm would defeat Lord Voldemort, the greatest Legilimens in history.

He bored in will all his might. He thought to himself, 'This is... *fun*.'

Chapter 11 -- Living Sacrifice

All had been revealed to Lord Voldemort. And what a treasure trove of information it was. Plans were already forming in his mind -- so many plans -- but, patience, patience... all in good time.

The first priority remained a living body and what remained of Bertha Jorkins was barely alive. Her mind was almost totally gone, not just her memory, but even some of the lower brain functions that automatically regulated her body were

damaged. She would not live long. Voldemort desperately needed to keep control of her body to keep it alive a little longer.

As he turned his attention to managing her breathing and heartbeat, he sensed something he missed before. There was another heartbeat and with it... another rudimentary *mind*... An unborn child! It was not fully formed, perhaps only five months old, and only just beginning to show on her plump body. Did she know? But there was nothing left of her mind to query. No matter. This was yet another instance in which good fortune comes to Lord Voldemort.

This would be the perfect vessel for his new being -- small, easily carried and concealed -- until he could return to England and obtain the essential ingredients for the potion that would enable *full* rebirth. There was a slight tinge of annoyance in knowing that this vessel's small size would make Wormtail's job easier.

He angrily thought to himself, 'Enough! Time to act!'

Voldemort took control of Bertha's mouth, which for some time now had stopped screaming, and spoke out loud, "Wormtail, come here."

He used Bertha's eyes to see. The sun was already up. He could see Wormtail's legs behind a distant tree. The lazy oaf was *sleeping!*

He hissed and spat in Parseltongue, "*Fetch him, Nagini.*" The small snake had returned to the camp when the screaming had stopped. It had sensed its master's pleasure. Now it slithered off toward Wormtail.

Voldemort attended to other matters.

Wormtail awoke with a start. It was quiet, but faint echoes of the screaming remained in his head. What the...? Nagini's tongue was flicking his ear again. He recoiled and scrambled to his feet. The snake hissed loudly.

Wormtail looked toward the campfire and saw Bertha still standing there, very straight and unnaturally stiff. But now she was naked. Her Muggle clothes were burning in the campfire. She had no color. She looked like a corpse. She stared at him without blinking and spoke, but it was clearly Lord Voldemort speaking in her voice. "Bring the unicorn blood and my wand."

Wormtail wanted to ask where his Master's wand was hidden, but thought better of it. He hurried off to retrieve the unicorn blood from its hiding place. The Dark Lord's wand was now there too. He grabbed the two vials and the wand and hurried back.

Bertha was now lying on the ground, on her back, but with her shoulders propped up using her elbows pulled back with her forearms on the ground. This kept her head up. She might have been reclining at the seaside sunbathing, enjoying a nice day.

“Kneel beside me.” There was no emotion. Her voice was flat.

Wormtail did so, on her left side. The snake was coiled on her right side.

“Follow my instructions precisely and without hesitation,” she ordered.

“Yes, My Lord,” replied Wormtail nervously.

Bertha leaned to one side and used the freed arm to reach down over her stomach. She used the nail of her index finger to make a visible red mark in the skin across her entire lower abdomen about six inches below her navel. She then resumed her reclining position and spoke again.

“Cut deeply along the mark...”

“My Lord?” questioned Wormtail

“DO IT!” barked Bertha’s voice.

Wormtail placed the two vials in his lap and used a curse to slice open the mark. It was a very deep cut but it bled much less than he expected. Bertha had not even flinched. Then her abdomen seemed to convulse and a tiny leg poked out of the cut. Wormtail recoiled and rocked backward.

“Retrieve the child and place it on the woman’s stomach,” she instructed.

“My hands are not clean, My Lord!” cried Wormtail.

“DO IT, *NOW!*” she bellowed.

Wormtail put down Voldemort’s wand. He was being as gentle as he could, but it took much more force than he expected to open the long cut with his hands and retrieve the tiny baby. He gently placed it on Bertha’s stomach, the umbilical cord trailing back into the cut. It stirred feebly. So small, its eyes were not yet open.

“It’s a girl, My Lord,” he whispered.

“No matter,” she said.

“Will you be able to save it, My Lord?” asked Wormtail hopefully.

“Save it? Save it? You think I am going to *save* it?” Voldemort laughed cruelly. But in Bertha’s voice, it sounded *monstrous*. “This is the living sacrifice to restore my physical being!”

Hearing this completely unnerved Wormtail. His mind was reeling. “But Bertha was going to be the living sac...”

“Bertha is spent and no longer suitable for this. However, she still has other uses,” Bertha again said without emotion.

“But, My Lord, an unborn child...” Wormtail was begging now. The tiny infant was wheezing and trembling.

“She is *not* unborn. You just delivered her yourself,” retorted Voldemort. Wormtail no longer thought of her as Bertha.

Wormtail was struck dumb by the callousness.

“You are wasting time, Wormtail. I have told you to follow my instructions precisely and without hesitation. You have not. If you fail to do so again, I will kill you. Do you understand?” said Voldemort.

“Yes, My Lord,” whimpered Wormtail, tears in his eyes.

“Place my wand in the child’s right hand,” commanded Voldemort.

Wormtail picked up the Dark Lord’s wand and carefully placed the handle in the baby’s right hand. He was surprised to see that the tiny hand could grip it at all. In fact, the tiny infant girl gripped the wand very tightly, though it was much too heavy for her to hold up. So Wormtail gently arranged the wand so it lay on Bertha’s stomach alongside the tiny body. The wand was twice as long as the baby was.

Voldemort’s instructions continued.

“Pick up the witch’s wand. Hold one vial of unicorn blood in your other hand. Have the other vial at the ready.”

Bertha’s wand was still laying on the ground where Wormtail had dropped it while standing next to her the night before. He could reach it from where he knelt. He picked it up with his wand hand and then took one vial from his lap in his other hand.

“Now hold your wand over the child and recite the incantation I taught you.”

Wormtail did so without error. The child became very still but continued breathing, though more feebly. Wormtail pitied it.

“Now touch your wand to the child’s head and repeat the incantation. Do not stop for any reason, no matter what happens.”

Wormtail did so, but this time when he said “...*and infuse this living sacrifice with the elixirs of death...*” Voldemort hissed loudly in Parseltongue and Nagini struck the child, sinking its poisonous fangs into the child’s tiny chest, and then withdrew.

The tiny body convulsed, one, two, three times and then lay still. Its pitiful little mouth gaped, as its last breath left its body.

Wormtail’s heart was broken. He cried openly.

Voldemort shouted, “Pour the unicorn blood into its mouth! Do it now! Quickly! Quickly!”

Wormtail’s hand was shaking almost uncontrollably as his shoulders heaved with racking deep sobs. But he managed to pour the contents of the vial into the tiny open mouth. It was too much; it overflowed and leaked down the chin and onto the tiny chest where two rows of angry looking puncture wounds remained from Nagini’s vicious bite.

Bertha’s head flew back and screamed triumphantly, “YES!” Then her arms flung out and she collapsed back flat on the ground.

Wormtail gazed sadly at the still baby... but it was no longer still...

It *pulsed*... so unnaturally it made Wormtail’s stomach turn. He had to fight back the urge to be sick. He looked away. He could not stand to look at it.

Wormtail knew something was happening. He could hear strange sounds -- writhing, convulsing, pumping, throbbing, stretching, and other sounds he could not describe. He *could not* look. He must have been kneeling for an hour. His knees ached. His feet were numb. But he *could not* look.

Then he heard it, one word, barely a whisper, high-pitched, “Wormtail.”

Chapter 12 -- Nagini’s Reward

Wormtail slowly turned his head to stare down at what lay on Bertha’s stomach.

He screamed.

It was an abomination.

It was much larger now, the length of perhaps a one-year-old baby, but that was because its arms and legs were folded in a fetal position. If stretched out it would have been at least three feet long. The hands and feet were curled like claws and were large, out of proportion to the body. The arms and legs were like sticks, with the skin stretched tightly over the protruding knees and elbows. The legs could never support its weight. The skin was now white and looked like leather, though many veins were visible beneath it. The body was that of a starving child, with a bloated belly and shrunken chest with exposed ribs. Breathing was audible and labored and the chest heaved with every breath.

But worst of all was the face. It was the face of a daemon, like the wood carving of an African witchdoctor's mask. The eyes were open and unblinking. They were red. The cheekbones were high and sharp, but the cheeks were shrunken and tight. Where the nose should have been were two vertical slits. The mouth was lipless and drawn open like the slash he had made in Bertha's abdomen. He imagined a serpent's tongue inside, but could not see it. It was a snake's face.

Then it spoke again, more shrill and louder this time. "Triumph! Lord Voldemort has returned to being!"

"My Lord!" croaked Wormtail, bile rising in his throat.

"Silence!" screeched Voldemort. "There is more to be done and I still require your strict obedience," Voldemort hissed. Then he spoke in Parseltongue, and the snake rose up and opened its mouth wide before Wormtail.

Voldemort commanded, "Pour the remaining vial of unicorn blood into Nagini's mouth."

Wormtail did so. His hand quivered. He did not like his hand being so close to the poisonous fangs.

Then Voldemort spoke again in Parseltongue and the snake struck again, this time hitting but not releasing the umbilical cord still attached to Voldemort's new body. The snake shook its head back and forth until the cord severed. It then took the end leading to Bertha's abdomen into its mouth.

Wormtail retched. He thought the snake was going to eat it, but it did not.

Instead, Voldemort feebly raised his wand, still clutched in the hand that Wormtail had placed it, a hand now with long skeletal fingers that coiled around it like a snake, and uttered an incantation in Parseltongue.

The snake... *pulsed* -- just as the child had.

This time Wormtail did not look away. He heard the same sounds as before. The snake grew, and grew and kept on growing, longer and larger. It pulsed as it grew -- each pulse sending a wave of greater size and length along its body. To his horror, he noticed the umbilical cord was also pulsing -- in time with the snake. And Bertha's body was... shriveling. Her body mass was being used to grow the snake. Voldemort must have done the same thing to grow the poor dead child into the... *creature*.

Wormtail cringed at the sight of it. He tried to get the image of the tiny little baby girl out of his mind. This was not a simple engorgement charm. The snake was actually feeding on Bertha. And Bertha was still alive; he could see her breathing, but her body was now nothing but loose skin hanging off her bones.

Wormtail almost fainted. This was dark magic he could never have imagined. He was horrified and terrified at the same time.

Finally, it stopped. Voldemort spoke in Parseltongue and Nagini released the umbilical cord. The snake was now at least twelve feet long and a foot thick in the middle.

Voldemort waved his wand slightly and a pink blanket, a baby blanket, dropped into Wormtail's arms. "Wormtail, pick me up and wrap me in the blanket." Then he added sardonically, "Do you like it? I picked pink just for you."

Wormtail did as he was told, but he had tears in his eyes. The tiny and innocent little baby girl swam in his vision. Holding the abomination that was Lord Voldemort in his arms like he would have wanted to hold the little girl made him angry.

"Bertha Jorkins has two more services to provide Lord Voldemort," said the creature in Wormtail's arms.

Wormtail blinked questioningly.

"Avada Kedavra!"

There was a green flash of light; Bertha was finally dead.

Wormtail was stunned. How was killing her a service to the Dark Lord?

Then Voldemort spoke again. It was another spell that Wormtail had never heard before and did not understand. Voldemort was making complex movements with his wand. It took some effort; he was breathing hard and fast. The spell was not long, but Voldemort repeated it six times. Then he pointed the wand at the snake

and there was a flash of dazzling blue light from the end of the Voldemort's wand to Nagini's head. At the same time, Voldemort gasped and then shuddered in Wormtail's arms.

He heard Voldemort say quietly to himself, "It is done; ...seven pieces."

Wormtail wondered what had just happened. "My Lord, what...?"

Voldemort cut him off. "Wormtail, you have been *somewhat* useful today... and the most privileged of my Death Eaters. You have witnessed the greatest Dark Magic ever performed. I have created a living being from the dead," Voldemort said triumphantly.

Then he declared with insane delight, "I do not *possess* this child; I *am* this child,"

Voldemort's voice was high pitched and clear. "The child's spirit is gone; it left her body when she died. But with my enchantment, Nagini's venom, and the unicorn blood -- two most perfectly opposite forces of death and life -- I took possession of the body and, with the power of my spirit, tipped the balance needed to restore life. Then I made Nagini a worthy companion of Lord Voldemort, returned to being at last. Finally, I performed a spell to complete my journey on the road to conquer... *death*," he finished in an imperious and self-satisfied tone.

Then his voice became ominous. "You should be in *awe* of what you have witnessed, but you are *repelled*. I heard you. I see your thoughts even now."

Wormtail did not speak. He began whimpering and shaking, still holding the abomination that was Voldemort in his arms, wrapped in the pretty pink blanket.

"Wormtail, your weakness, your pathetic sentimentality, is clearly a danger to me. But you have given me pause to wonder about my other servants... How many of my Death Eaters are truly prepared to embrace such extraordinary Dark Magic. Perhaps Lord Voldemort has expected too much of his followers. Clearly, only I who have traveled the road to conquering death, am truly capable of appreciating what you have had the privilege to witness today.'

Wormtail understood that his master had decided his fate, but then realized he could not move a muscle. He could only watch as the creature in his arms pointed its wand at his face and said, "*Obliviate*."

Wormtail had expected to die, but instead heard the Dark Lord utter the Memory Charm. An instant later he no longer remembered.

As he meddled with Wormtail's memory, Voldemort said to himself, 'Unfortunately, I still have need of you, you filthy... worm tail.'

Chapter 13 -- What You Don't Know

Wormtail was aware that he was standing in the camp, holding the Dark Lord in a pink blanket. Odd... pink. He had just helped his master perform incredible dark magic that restored him to the rudimentary body he was holding.

Wormtail shivered a little, unsure why.

Bertha Jorkins was lying on the ground, dead. Voldemort had just killed her. She was still wearing her long gray traveling cloak, but curiously, no shoes. Her travel bag was open near the campfire; maybe they were in there. Her face seemed to be very thin, her cheeks quite sunken. Odd, he did not remember her being so thin when he overpowered her at the inn.

She had provided vital information to the Dark Lord, but overcoming the memory charm someone had placed on her had been too much. Her mind was gone. She could not be Imperiused and used as a spy in the Ministry, so Lord Voldemort had mercifully killed her.

This was the part Wormtail did not like. Nagini, the Dark Lord's huge pet snake, was already slithering toward Bertha's still warm body.

"Nagini, ...lunch," the Dark Lord said with obvious delight.

Chapter 14 -- Bon Voyage

The Dark Lord wanted to return to England immediately, but Wormtail, as a good and faithful servant, convinced him to take a few days to build up his physical strength. The dark magic, which had been used to restore the Dark Lord to his rudimentary body, required a high price -- Nagini's venom, and a lot of it, every few hours. Fortunately, she was a *large* snake.

Wormtail thought it was remarkable to have found such a large snake in Albania. He had to milk her venom at least three times a day. It had to be fresh. Nagini did not resist, but Wormtail did not like being near the fangs. The Dark Lord tormented him every time he milked her, saying he could not possibly make an anti-venom potion in their present circumstances. So, Wormtail would have to be careful.

In those few days, the Dark Lord outlined his plan to Wormtail -- the plan to restore himself fully to his body. To Wormtail, it seemed very complex. He liked simple plans. But he was too afraid to question the Dark Lord now.

Finally, they were ready. After Wormtail obliterated evidence of the camp and Bertha's bag, they set out. The Dark Lord was not strong enough to Disapparate, even using side-along Apparation. And though the Dark Mark on Wormtail's arm was slightly darker -- and was slowly getting darker as the Dark Lord gained strength -- the Dark Lord refused to use it to call his Death Eaters to him. He said there was only one Death Eater outside of Azkaban he fully trusted. Wormtail did not know who that was and did not ask. He already knew the Dark Lord did not trust him. However, he was still determined to do everything he could to be rewarded for his service.

Wormtail was quite proud of himself; he had come up with the plan to get back to England. They would travel disguised as a Muggle family with a sick child. The Dark Lord had agreed to his proposal without comment. Wormtail had hoped for a compliment, even a snide one, but none came.

The Dark Lord refused to travel by sea as Wormtail had. Crossing the Channel by boat was as much as he would allow. Wormtail never even considered suggesting traveling by Muggle 'airy-o-plane', as he thought they were called. The idea terrified him. So, they would travel by car and train across Europe.

Voldemort slightly altered Wormtail's appearance, giving him long black hair and a beard. It would not fool a probity probe or close examination by Aurors, but it would be good enough for casual inspection. And now Voldemort himself would be able to deal with any problems that developed along the way -- meaning there would not *be* any problems.

Wormtail carried his master in a conjured baby sling on his chest and used magic to clear a path through the forest all the way to the inn. Nagini easily slithered behind him as fast as Wormtail could walk.

As before, the inn was not busy in the morning. They easily overpowered the landlord couple. Wormtail took the man's Muggle clothes. Voldemort Imperiused the man to weight himself down and drown himself in the nearby lake.

Wormtail found a large steamer trunk for Nagini. He loaded it into the small lorry behind the inn and had the Muggle woman drive them to the town. She had been Imperiused to play the role of Wormtail's wife, which he fully enjoyed during the journey. Wormtail liberally used the Imperius Curse to get train tickets, Muggle money, and whatever else they needed.

Even though they kept to themselves as much as possible, Muggles would always go out of their way to help them, even without being Imperiused, especially whenever Wormtail mentioned "sick child being taken to see a specialist in London." The biggest problem was that these helpful people always wanted to "see the poor child." They could usually avoid it by saying she was sleeping, and they did not want to disturb her.

However, sometimes someone caught sight of the Dark Lord. A memory charm was always necessary. Wormtail thought these Muggles were lucky. The Dark Lord in his present form was truly hideous. It made Wormtail cringe every time he saw what he could only think of as... *the creature*. He was very happy the Dark Lord usually remained bundled up in the pink blanket.

Nagini was another matter. Wormtail had to milk her several times a day. She also needed to be fed nearly every day, which was highly unusual for a snake. Fortunately, many Muggles travel with their pets. So Wormtail had a sufficient supply of mostly small dogs to feed to her in the steamer trunk.

They finally arrived at the French coast. Wormtail arranged passage on fast ferry. Fortunately, the weather was good and the Channel seas were calm. Wormtail had dreaded the Dark Lord's temper if the short sea voyage had been bad.

To Wormtail, the Dark Lord almost seem cheerful on returning to English soil.

"Wormtail, it is now only a matter of time until I am fully restored to my body. Then my destiny shall unfold as I have foreseen. I shall destroy Harry Potter, Dumbledore, and the Ministry of Magic. I will lead the wizarding world to its rightful place -- to rule over the Muggles. They will bow down. They will be our servants, nothing more. The world they know will *end*."

"Yes, My Lord," Wormtail chimed sycophantically.

Voldemort ignored him, apparently still thinking about his vision of the future.

Then he said, "Take me... *home*, Wormtail," with obvious sarcasm in his voice.

Chapter 15 -- Home Sweet Home

They arrived at the London train station and Imperiused a stout porter to retrieve their large steamer trunk. The porter found them a taxi driver, who helped him load the trunk and then drove them more than a hundred miles into the country at no charge to the small town of Little Hangleton.

On their way out of London, they drove along the same street in which Wormtail had been confronted by Sirius Black some twelve years before -- the same street Wormtail had blown open, killing a dozen Muggles, making his escape and leaving Sirius to take the blame. He regretted leaving his wand behind, but it had been a necessary part of his plan. At least he had Bertha's wand now.

Wormtail smiled remembering how clever he had been. He recalled how Sirius had told them -- Lupin, the Potter boy, the Weasley brat, and the Mudblood girl --

what had happened when they were all in the Shrieking Shack so recently. It now seemed like ages ago. But Sirius had had been dazed and knocked to the ground by the blast which had left a huge crater in the street. He had not seen everything.

Wormtail had also been knocked down, but not dazed since he had prepared himself for it. He had quickly cursed off his finger and dropped it onto the ground. He greatly admired his own courage for being able to complete this key part of his plan. He also dropped his wand and left it as additional evidence of his 'death'. Then he pulled the Dark Lord's wand from his pocket and dropped it as well. He transformed into a rat, grabbed the Dark Lord's wand in his teeth, and dashed into the sewer as Sirius was getting back onto his feet.

In the sewer, Wormtail hid the Dark Lord's wand in a small niche he found high in the wall, well above the high water line. The location was a good distance from the crater; so any workmen repairing the damage to the street would not come near it. In human form, he first placed concealment and animal repelling charms on the hiding place.

Then as a rat again, Wormtail set off for the place he hoped would enable him to hide in plain sight while keeping in touch with everything important going on in the wizarding world -- including the Ministry of Magic and the Order of the Phoenix. How was this possible? Because he had picked the home of Arthur Weasley, a fellow Order member and Ministry employee. Arthur had a nice quiet place in the country. Wormtail would be safe there. And it turned out better than he could have possibly hoped. Simply by acting tame and scurrying around their garden, he had been adopted by the third oldest Weasley boy, Percy -- pompous even then -- and brought into the house. Life was good.

Wormtail had planned to seek the Dark Lord, but initially, the risk had been too great; Aurors were actively hunting Death Eaters after the Dark Lord's disappearance. He needed to wait it out. But as time went by, waiting just a little longer always seemed more prudent. And, of course, life was good. And so it continued that way for twelve years.

The sound of tires on gravel brought Wormtail back from his remembrances. They had arrived at the old, abandoned Riddle House. Remarkably, Voldemort let the Muggle taxi driver go after simply wiping his memory. Wormtail supposed the Dark Lord had been too tired from the journey to deal with anything more. Wormtail let Nagini out of the trunk, carried his master into the house and they quickly settled in the upstairs drawing room.

Voldemort disposed of the Muggle woman who had completed her role posing as Wormtail's wife. He fed her to Nagini, who had not had a *large* meal since leaving Albania. The Dark Lord chastised Wormtail for his lack of proper consideration

for Nagini during the journey. He knew that Wormtail was hoping to keep the Muggle woman, but Voldemort had to punish him for consorting with a Muggle.

They had left Albania less than a week before. It had been just ten weeks since Wormtail had left Hogwarts to find his Master.

“Wormtail, does Lord Voldemort have to go over the plan with you yet again? Does he need to make you memorize it and repeat it one hundred times without error like the incantation in Albania?” said Voldemort from his chair before the fireplace in the Riddle House.

“My Lord, what incantation do you mean?” asked Wormtail, still thinking of a way to convince his master to simplify the plan.

Voldemort quickly said, “Never mind.” He changed the subject. “Is there any potion left?”

“There is a little more in the bottle, My Lord, if you are still hungry.”

Frank Brice, the old caretaker of the Riddle House, was listening outside the door.

Chapter 16 -- Ten Months Later: Secrets and Lies

In the graveyard of Little Hangleton, Harry Potter was tightly bound from ankle to neck to the gravestone of Tom Riddle. Lord Voldemort stood with his Death Eaters arranged in a circle around himself, Harry, and a sobbing Wormtail.

One of the Death Eaters, Lucius Malfoy, addressed Lord Voldemort.

“Master, we crave to know... we beg you to tell us... how you have achieved this... this miracle... how you have managed to return to us...”

“Ah, what a story it is, Lucius,” said Voldemort.

And then he thought to himself, ‘And you will not hear the half of it, because as I have learned, my Death Eaters are not ready to accept the truth of my greatest Dark Magic.’

Voldemort began to tell his self-aggrandizing lies, amused by his power to deceive even his most devoted followers. For certainly, the whole truth would risk their loyalty -- as it had Wormtail's.

The End

End Notes: All content in **bold** text in this story is taken from the Harry Potter novels by J. K. Rowling, as follows:

This story Chapter 2: From Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban, Chapter Twenty

This story Chapter 15: From Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire, Chapter One

This story Chapter 16: From Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire, Chapter Thirty-Three