

Chapter 45

Bellatrix's smile was sharp and cruel and absolutely mad.

"We accelerate all our plans immediately. The Diagon Alley attack moves up to this weekend. We hit them when they least expect it, cause maximum chaos and casualties among the sheep. And we make absolutely certain Potter knows it's entirely his fault. Every death, every injury, every single drop of blood spilled will be because he provoked us with his little heroics."

"That's extremely risky," Dolohov said, his tone measured. "We'll be exposing ourselves significantly earlier than planned."

"Life is risk," Bellatrix countered dismissively. "Besides, we have advantages Potter doesn't know about yet. Resources he can't possibly counter. We'll crush his pathetic little rebellion before it even truly begins."

She looked around at the assembled Death Eaters, her wild eyes taking in each masked face. "Spread the word through all our contacts. I want eyes on Potter at all times. I want to know everywhere he goes, everyone he sees, everything he does. And the moment, the very moment I get a proper opening, I'm going to remind baby Potter exactly why he should fear the name Bellatrix Lestrange."

"What about the werewolf situation?" a Death Eater asked cautiously. "Do we attempt to recruit replacement packs?"

"Leave that to me," Bellatrix said dismissively, waving her hand as if shooing away an irritating fly. "I have contacts who can provide what we need. Greyback wasn't the only alpha with ambitions. You lot just focus on gathering intelligence on Potter's movements and preparing for the Diagon Alley operation. I want it executed flawlessly."

She paused, her expression becoming thoughtful in a way that was somehow more disturbing than her rage. "Actually, perhaps we should send Potter a little message. Something to let him know we're aware of his activities. Something personal."

"What did you have in mind?" Dolohov asked warily.

"His precious Weasleys," Bellatrix said with a giggle that made several Death Eaters flinch. "We already took the blood traitor mother. Perhaps it's time we visited the grieving family again. The father works at the Ministry, doesn't he? And there are a few at St. Mungo's. So easy to arrange an accident, or a few."

"The Dark Lord wants us focused on larger objectives," Dolohov said carefully. "Not personal vendettas."

"This isn't personal," Bellatrix snapped. "This is strategic. Potter clearly has emotional attachments to certain people. The Weasleys, the mudbloods he associates

with. If we threaten what he cares about, he'll make mistakes. He'll expose himself trying to protect them."

She began pacing again, her mind clearly racing with possibilities. "Yes, yes, that could work beautifully. We make him react instead of act. Force him onto the defensive. And when he inevitably tries to play hero again, we'll be waiting for him."

"You're assuming he'll take the bait," Rowle pointed out.

"Of course he will," Bellatrix said confidently. "He's a Gryffindor. Brave, noble, stupidly self-sacrificing. He can't help himself. It's in his nature to rush headlong into danger to save others. We just need to dangle the right bait in front of him. Like we did before."

She stopped pacing and turned to face the assembled Death Eaters with a manic grin. "This is going to be such fun. I haven't had a proper challenge in years. Most of you are utterly boring, and the Order members we've captured barely lasted five minutes under my attention. But Potter? Potter will be different. He's strong, trained, and he has that delicious will to survive. Breaking him will be absolutely delightful."

"You're talking about him like he's already captured," Dolohov said.

"He will be," Bellatrix said with absolute certainty. "It's only a matter of time. He's skilled, I'll grant him that much. Killing the Carrows and eliminating Greyback's pack proves he's no longer the frightened little boy hiding at Hogwarts. But skill can only take you so far against experience and numbers."

She looked around the room again, her eyes glittering with anticipation. "The baby is playing a dangerous game, attacking us directly. He thinks because he won a few skirmishes, he can win the war. But he's forgotten something crucial."

"What's that?" someone asked.

"We don't fight fair," Bellatrix said simply. "We don't have rules or morals holding us back. We'll use every advantage, exploit every weakness, and sacrifice whatever pawns necessary to achieve our goals. Potter still clings to his precious heroic ideals. That will be his downfall."

She giggled again, the sound echoing eerily through the stone hall. "I wonder how long those ideals will last when I have his little friends screaming in front of him. How long before he breaks and begs me to stop. How long before that famous Gryffindor courage crumbles into nothing."

"Bellatrix," Dolohov said firmly. "The Dark Lord gave specific instructions about Potter. He's not to be killed or permanently damaged."

"I know, I know," Bellatrix said irritably. "You keep repeating that like I'm some kind of simpleton. I won't kill him or damage him beyond repair. But there's so much I can do within those parameters. So many ways to hurt someone without leaving

permanent marks. The Cruciatus Curse, for example, leaves no physical damage. Neither does psychological torture."

She smiled widely, showing too many teeth. "By the time I'm finished with baby Potter, he'll wish I had killed him. He'll beg the Dark Lord to end his suffering. And then, when he's completely broken, we'll hand him over and watch our Lord finish what he started all those years ago."

"What about the veela?" Rowle asked. "If she's working with Potter, she's also a threat."

"The French whore?" Bellatrix's expression turned contemptuous. "She's nothing. Powerful perhaps, but still just a half breed playing at being a warrior. I'll deal with her when the time comes. Maybe I'll give her to our new werewolf allies as a toy. They'd enjoy breaking in something so pretty."

Several Death Eaters shifted uncomfortably at the casual cruelty in her voice.

"We should be careful not to underestimate them," Dolohov warned. "Potter and his allies eliminated sixteen werewolves including Greyback. That's not the work of amateurs."

"I'm not underestimating anyone," Bellatrix said coldly. "I'm simply being realistic about our advantages. We have numbers, experience, and the element of surprise on our side. Potter doesn't know we're aware of his little act with Greyback. He thinks he's being clever, striking from the shadows. But we see him. We know what he's doing. And we're going to turn his own tactics against him."

She walked over to the still twitching Death Eater she'd cursed earlier and nudged him with her boot. "Get up, you useless lump. Your pathetic display is embarrassing."

The man struggled to his feet, still shaking from the aftereffects of the Cruciatus Curse.

"Let this be a lesson to all of you," Bellatrix announced. "Weakness will not be tolerated. Failure will be punished. The Dark Lord expects excellence from his servants, and I expect nothing less. Potter has thrown down the gauntlet by attacking us. Now we pick it up and show him what real power looks like."

She raised her wand and conjured a silver skull in the air, the Dark Mark glowing with eerie green light. "This is our symbol. Our promise. Death to all who oppose the Dark Lord. Potter thinks he can fight us? Let him try. We'll bury him alongside his mudblood mother and blood traitor father."

The assembled Death Eaters remained silent, watching their most devoted member with a mixture of fear and respect.

"You have your orders," Bellatrix said, dismissing them with a wave. "Get out of my sight and start preparing. The Diagon Alley attack happens in two days. I want everything perfect. And I want intelligence on Potter's location and activities delivered to me daily."

The Death Eaters began filing out quickly, none wanting to linger in her presence longer than necessary. Soon only Dolohov and Rowle remained, both studying Bellatrix with wary expressions.

"You're playing a dangerous game," Dolohov said quietly once they were alone. "If the Dark Lord discovers you're pursuing a personal vendetta against Potter instead of following his precise orders, he won't be pleased."

"The Dark Lord appreciates initiative and results," Bellatrix countered. "Besides, everything I'm doing serves his ultimate goal. Destroying Potter's support network only makes him easier to capture when the time comes. I'm doing our Lord a service by weakening his greatest enemy."

"Just be careful," Dolohov warned. "Potter's proven more dangerous than anyone anticipated. He killed the Carrows, two elite Death Eaters with decades of experience each, and thirty Death Eaters in a single night. He eliminated Greyback, one of the most vicious creatures in Britain. Don't underestimate him simply because he's young."

"I'm not underestimating anyone," Bellatrix repeated, her voice sharp. "I'm simply refusing to cower before a teenage boy, no matter how lucky he's been so far. Potter bleeds just like everyone else. And very soon I'm going to prove it to all of you doubters."

Rowle and Dolohov exchanged meaningful glances but said nothing more. They left together, their footsteps echoing as they departed.

Bellatrix stood alone in the hall, her mind racing with plans and possibilities. Potter had struck twice now, had eliminated key assets and proven himself a genuine threat to their operations. That was interesting. Exciting even. She hadn't had a worthy opponent in far too long.

"Little baby Potter," she murmured to herself, her voice carrying in the empty space. "All grown up and playing with the big boys now. How absolutely delightful. You have no idea what you've started."

Her smile widened, becoming something truly unhinged and terrifying. "I can't wait to break you. To hear you scream my name. To watch the light fade from those disgustingly bright green eyes as you realize you've lost everything that ever mattered to you. It's going to be beautiful. Perfect. Exactly what you deserve for daring to defy the Dark Lord."

She began to laugh, the sound starting as a low chuckle but growing into full manic cackling that would have chilled anyone who heard it. The laugh echoed through the empty hall, bouncing off stone walls and filling the space with madness.

"You should have stayed hidden, Potter," she said between bouts of laughter. "Should have cowered behind Dumbledore's robes like the frightened little orphan you are. But you got brave. Got ambitious. Started thinking you could actually win."

Her laughter intensified, becoming almost hysterical. "And now you're going to learn the price of that ambition. You're going to learn what happens when you draw the attention of Bellatrix Lestrange. And oh, baby Potter, it's going to hurt so very, very much."

The laughter continued as she moved through the hall, her dark form gradually disappearing into the shadows at the far end.

The war was escalating. Blood would flow. And before it was over, one side would be utterly destroyed.

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Harry woke slowly to the most pleasant sensation imaginable.

Warmth enveloped his cock, wet and tight and absolutely perfect. His eyes fluttered open to find sunlight streaming through the window and Daphne's blonde head bobbing between his legs beneath the covers. She'd pulled the sheet back just enough to access him, and her talented mouth was working him with perfect skill.

"Daph," Harry groaned, his hands automatically moving to tangle in her hair.

She hummed around his length in response, the vibration sending pleasure racing up his spine. Her tongue swirled around the sensitive head before she took him deeper, her throat relaxing to accommodate his size.

Beside him, Evelyn stirred. Harry turned his head to find her watching them with hooded eyes, a satisfied smile playing at her lips. She made no move to join or interrupt, simply propping herself up on one elbow to observe while squeezing her bare breast with the other.

"Good morning," Evelyn murmured. "Looks like Daphne wanted to wake you properly."

Harry tried to respond but Daphne chose that moment to take him to the root, her nose pressing against his pelvis. The words died in his throat, replaced by a helpless moan.

Daphne pulled back slowly, releasing his cock with a wet pop. "Good morning, Harry," she said sweetly, as if she wasn't currently giving him the best wake-up call of his life. "Sleep well?"

"Very," Harry managed. "Though I'm awake now."

"I noticed," Daphne said with a smirk. "Your cock certainly is. It was already hard when I slipped in. Were you having pleasant dreams?"

"Nothing compared to this right now," Harry replied.

Daphne laughed and took him back into her mouth. Her hand wrapped around the base while her lips worked the upper half, creating a rhythm that had Harry's hips bucking involuntarily. She was intimately familiar with every spot that drove him wild, and she exploited that knowledge ruthlessly.

"She's very skilled," Evelyn observed conversationally. "I taught her that trick with her tongue. The one she's doing right now."

Harry groaned again as Daphne's tongue did something absolutely sinful to the underside of his shaft. His grip tightened in her hair, and she moaned around him in encouragement.

"Faster," Harry gasped. "Daphne, please."

She obeyed immediately, increasing her pace. Her head bobbed up and down with purpose now, and the wet sounds of her efforts filled the room. Her free hand moved to cup his balls, massaging them gently.

"That's it," Evelyn encouraged softly. "Make him feel good, darling. Show him what you've learned."

Daphne doubled her efforts, taking him deep into her throat on each downstroke. Harry felt his release building rapidly, pleasure coiling tight in his core.

"I'm close," he warned breathlessly.

Daphne pulled back until just the tip remained in her mouth. Her hand stroked his shaft rapidly while her tongue worked the sensitive head. The combination was devastating, and Harry came with a groan. Hot ropes of cum filled Daphne's mouth, and she swallowed every drop without hesitation.

She kept sucking gently until he stopped pulsing, and then released him with a satisfied smile. "Good morning indeed," she said, licking her lips.

Harry pulled her up for a kiss, tasting himself on her tongue. Daphne melted against him, pressing her curves all over his front, her body warm and pliant.

"That was quite a show," Evelyn said with amusement. "But I think you're not quite done yet, are you?"

Daphne pulled back from the kiss to look at Harry with heated eyes. "Not even close. I woke up this morning thinking about you. About what you two were up to last night with each other. About how much I wanted you too."

"Then take what you want," Harry said, his hands moving to the nightgown she wore. He pulled it up and over her head in one smooth motion, revealing her naked body beneath.

Daphne straddled his hips immediately, grinding her already wet pussy against his semi hard cock. The friction made them both gasp, and Harry felt himself hardening again rapidly.

"So eager," Evelyn murmured from the side. "My daughter knows what she wants."

"Always," Daphne agreed breathlessly. She reached down to position Harry's now fully erect cock at her entrance. "And right now I want this."

She sank down onto him in one smooth motion, taking him to the hilt. They both moaned at the sensation of him filling her completely. Daphne's inner walls clenched around him, hot and wet and perfect.

"Merlin," Harry groaned. "You feel amazing."

"So do you," Daphne gasped. She began to move, rising up until just his tip remained inside before slamming back down. Her pace was immediately aggressive, riding him with purpose.

Harry's hands found her hips, helping to guide her movements. He watched in fascination as her breasts bounced with each thrust, her nipples hard peaks that begged for attention.

"Touch yourself," Harry commanded. "Play with your tits while you ride me."

Daphne obeyed immediately, her hands moving to cup her breasts. She kneaded the soft flesh and pinched her nipples, her head falling back in pleasure.

"Beautiful," Evelyn said softly. She'd moved closer now, watching them with undisguised arousal. Her hand had slipped between her own legs, touching herself as she observed. "You two look so good together."

"Mother," Daphne gasped, her eyes finding Evelyn's. "Watch me. Watch him fuck me."

"I am watching," Evelyn replied, her voice thick with desire. "I'm watching you take that magnificent cock so well. He feels so good inside you, right? Like you were made for him."

Daphne's pace increased, her hips moving faster. The sound of flesh slapping against flesh filled the room, punctuated by their moans and gasps.

"Harder," Daphne demanded. "Harry, fuck me harder!"

Harry planted his feet on the bed and began thrusting up to meet her downward strokes. The change in angle had Daphne crying out sharply, and her inner walls clenched around him.

"Right there," she gasped. "Don't stop."

Harry had no intention of stopping. He drove into her relentlessly, his hands gripping her hips hard enough to leave marks. Daphne braced her hands on his chest, leveraging herself for deeper penetration.

"You're so deep," Daphne moaned. "I can feel you everywhere."

"Good," Harry growled. "I want you to remember this. Remember how I make you feel."

"Always," Daphne promised. "I always remember."

Her movements became erratic as her orgasm approached. Harry could feel it in the way her pussy fluttered around him, in the desperation of her moans.

"Touch your clit," Harry commanded. "Make yourself come on my cock."

Daphne's hand flew to her clit immediately, rubbing tight circles around the sensitive nub. The added stimulation was all she needed. Within seconds she was coming with a scream, her entire body shaking as waves of pleasure crashed through her.

Harry kept thrusting through her orgasm, prolonging it as long as possible. Daphne's inner walls spasmed around him rhythmically, milking his cock with each contraction.

"Fill me," Daphne gasped when she could form words again. "I want to feel you come inside me."

"Not yet," Harry said, his control iron clad despite his own rapidly building release. "I want you to come again first."

He rolled them suddenly, reversing their positions so Daphne was beneath him. Her legs wrapped around his waist automatically, pulling him deeper.

"Harry," Daphne moaned as he began moving again. His thrusts were slower now but deeper, each one firm and purposeful.

"That's it," Evelyn encouraged from beside them. She was still touching herself, her fingers moving faster between her legs. "Make her scream again. Show her how well you can fuck her."

Harry adjusted his angle slightly and Daphne's eyes went wide. He was hitting that perfect spot inside her now, the one that made her see stars.

"Oh fuck," Daphne gasped. "Just like that. Don't you dare stop."

Harry maintained the angle and pace, driving into her with steady purpose. His thumb found her clit, rubbing in time with his thrusts, and Daphne's second orgasm built rapidly, pleasure coiling tight in her core.

"Come for me," Harry commanded. "Let me feel you again."

Daphne came with a wordless cry, her back arching off the bed. Her pussy clamped down on Harry's cock like a vise, and the sensation pushed him over the edge. He buried himself to the hilt and came hard, emptying himself deep inside her as she milked every drop from him.

They stayed locked together as their orgasms faded, both breathing heavily. Finally Harry collapsed beside her, pulling Daphne against his chest.

"That was incredible," Daphne breathed.

"Agreed," Evelyn said with satisfaction. She'd clearly found her own release while watching them. "You two are quite entertaining in the morning."

Daphne laughed breathlessly. "We aim to please."

They lay there for several more minutes, just catching their breath and enjoying the afterglow of their orgasms. Eventually reality intruded, and they knew they needed to get ready for the day.

"We should get downstairs," Harry said reluctantly. "The others will be waiting."

"Probably wondering where we are," Daphne agreed with a smirk. "I'm sure they'll have some idea though."

They cleaned up with quick showers, separately, and got dressed. Harry pulled on comfortable trousers and a shirt while Daphne selected a simple blue dress. Evelyn donned her usual elegant robes, looking perfectly put together despite their activities.

As they made their way downstairs together, Harry couldn't help but smile. Whatever challenges the day brought, at least it was starting pleasantly.

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The sitting room was already full when they arrived.

Susan, Hannah, Astoria, and Tracey were gathered around the low table, clearly having already eaten breakfast. Amelia sat in one of the armchairs looking much better than she had the night before, her wounded arm properly healed. Nym occupied the couch, her hair its usual vibrant pink though her expression remained somber. Fleur stood by the window, her fingertips playing with the fabric of the white curtain.

Every head turned as Harry, Daphne, and Evelyn entered together.

Susan's eyebrows rose slightly, and a knowing smile played at her lips. Hannah smirked, unable to hide her amusement. Tracey openly smirked like her while Astoria simply looked satisfied, as if she'd won some private bet.

Amelia's reaction was the most interesting. Her eyes locked onto Evelyn immediately, and she bit her lower lip. Evelyn noticed the attention and met Amelia's gaze steadily, giving the barest nod of acknowledgment.

"Good morning," Harry said, trying to maintain some semblance of normalcy. "Sorry we're late."

"I'm sure you had important things to attend to," Susan said innocently, though her eyes sparkled with mischief.

"Very important," Daphne agreed without a hint of embarrassment. She settled onto the couch beside Nym while Harry took a seat in the remaining armchair. Evelyn positioned herself near Amelia, the two women exchanging another meaningful look.

"We were just about to discuss last night," Amelia said. "I think everyone deserves to hear what happened in detail."

"Agreed," Harry said. "The attack went exactly as planned. We eliminated Greyback's entire pack with no casualties on our side, though Amelia was injured."

All eyes turned to the Minister of Magic.

"A werewolf got past my guard," Amelia explained. "Harry intervened before it could do serious damage, but I took a claw strike to the arm. It's healing properly now."

"You saved her life," Fleur said, looking at Harry with undisguised admiration.

"I did what anyone would do," Harry replied.

"Not anyone," Amelia corrected quietly. "You abandoned your fight with Greyback to protect me. That was a tactical risk that could have backfired badly."

"But it didn't," Harry said simply. "You're alive, Greyback's dead, and we completed the mission."

"Speaking of Greyback," Susan interjected. "What did you learn from him? You mentioned you used Legilimency."

Harry's expression darkened at the memory. "His mind was a mess. More animal than human. But I found what we needed. Safe house locations, names of collaborators, future targets."

"And Bellatrix?" Nym asked immediately, leaning forward intently.

"He knew her last known location as of three days ago," Harry confirmed. "A manor house in Yorkshire. Old pureblood family estate that's been abandoned for years. She's been using it as a base of operations."

"Then we go there," Nym said firmly. "As soon as possible."

"Not yet," Harry countered. "We need to scout it first. Understand the defenses. Bellatrix is paranoid and extremely dangerous. Rushing in without proper intelligence would be suicide."

"Harry's right," Amelia agreed. "Bellatrix Lestrange is one of the most skilled duelers in Britain. She's also completely insane, which makes her unpredictable. We need to be smart about this."

"What else did you learn?" Evelyn asked, her tone thoughtful. "You mentioned future targets."

"Diagon Alley," Harry said grimly. "They're planning a major attack during the busy shopping period. Greyback's pack was supposed to provide shock troops for maximum casualties."

The room fell silent as everyone processed this information.

"When?"

"He didn't have a specific date," Harry admitted. "But soon. Before the school year starts. They want to hit when the crowds are largest."

"That gives us maybe two weeks at most," Amelia calculated. "I'll need to increase Auror presence in Diagon Alley immediately. Coordinate with the shopkeepers. Prepare emergency protocols."

"There's something else," Harry said. "When I was in Greyback's mind, I saw memories of the attack on the Burrow. Bellatrix planned it specifically. She wanted to punish the Weasleys for being blood traitors."

Nym's hands clenched into fists. "That bitch."

"Greyback volunteered eagerly," Harry continued, his voice hard. "He saw it as an opportunity to create more werewolves for his pack. He bit Bill deliberately, not to kill but to transform. The cruelty was intentional."

"We will make her pay for all of it," Fleur said softly, her veela magic flickering just beneath the surface. "For Molly Weasley. For Remus Lupin. For Bill Weasley. For everyone she has hurt."

"We will," Harry agreed. "But we need to be smart about it. Emotional reactions get people killed."

"Still, the end result is what matters," Evelyn added. "Greyback is dead, his pack is eliminated, and we have actionable intelligence. That's a significant victory."

"But we can't rest on it," Harry said. "The Death Eaters will retaliate. Greyback's death will have reached them by now. They'll be planning their response."

"Let them plan," Nym said fiercely. "We'll be ready."

"Will we?" Astoria asked quietly. "They have more numbers, more experience, and they don't play by any rules."

"Neither do we anymore," Daphne said firmly. "Harry proved that last night. We're not just defending anymore. We're taking the fight to them."

"Which is exactly what they'll expect now," Amelia warned. "Harry's killed the Carrows and now Greyback. The Death Eaters know someone is actively hunting them. They'll be more cautious, more prepared."

"Good," Harry said. "Let them be scared. Let them look over their shoulders. That's better than them feeling safe to attack innocents whenever they please."

"We need a broader strategy," Evelyn said thoughtfully. "Picking off individual targets is effective but limited. We need to think about the larger picture."

"The larger picture is Voldemort," Harry said bluntly. "As long as he's alive, this war continues. Everything else is just delaying the inevitable."

"True," Amelia acknowledged. "But we're not ready to face him directly yet. None of us are."

"Then we keep eliminating his support structure," Harry said. "His Death Eaters, his creatures, his resources. We weaken him until we are ready."

"And Bellatrix is the next target," Nym said.

"Yes," Harry agreed. "But we do it right. We scout the manor thoroughly. We plan our approach carefully. We don't give her any opportunity to escape or ambush us."

"I can help with the scouting," Fleur offered.

"And I can dig up information about the manor," Amelia added. "Old property records, historical surveys. Anything that might give us an advantage."

"What about us?" Susan asked, gesturing to herself, Daphne, Hannah, Tracey, and Astoria. "We've been training constantly. When do we get to help?"

Harry looked at each of them in turn. They'd clearly been working hard based on their tired appearance and the magical residue he could sense clinging to them.

"Show me," he said simply. "After this meeting, we go to the training room. You demonstrate what you've learned, and I'll decide if you're ready for field work."

"That's fair," Daphne said before anyone could protest. "We need to prove we won't be liabilities."

"We won't be," Susan said confidently. "We've been pushing ourselves hard. Evelyn helped us last night after you left."

"I noticed the improvement," Evelyn confirmed. "They're not ready for front line combat yet, but they're getting closer."

"Then we keep training," Harry said. "Because the next fight might be even more dangerous than the last. Bellatrix is in a different league from Greyback."

"We understand the risks," Hannah said quietly. "We're not children anymore, Harry. We know what we're getting into."

Harry studied her for a moment, seeing the determination in her eyes. She was right. They weren't children. They were young witches preparing for war, and he couldn't protect them from that reality forever. And... and if push came to shove, he could stop holding back and reveal his true abilities in the battlefield.

"Alright," he said finally. "We train this morning. This afternoon, Fleur and I will scout the manor. Tomorrow we finalize our plans for dealing with Bellatrix."

"And the Diagon Alley attack?" Amelia asked.

"Coordinate with your Aurors," Harry said. "Increase security but try to be subtle about it. We don't want to scare off the Death Eaters entirely, just make sure we're ready when they strike."

"You want to use it as a trap," Amelia realized.

"Why not?" Harry said. "They're planning to attack a crowded area. We make sure we have people in place to respond immediately. Turn their ambush into our counter ambush."

"That's risky," Evelyn said. "Innocent people could still get hurt."

"They'll get hurt either way," Harry replied grimly. "At least this way we have a chance to minimize casualties and eliminate more Death Eaters in the process."

Amelia nodded slowly. "I'll work on it. But I'll need help coordinating. This is bigger than just a few Aurors on patrol."

"I can assist," Evelyn offered. "I have contacts with various shopkeepers. A few small nudges here and there and we can arrange appropriate security without raising suspicion."

"What about me?" Nym asked. "What's my role in all this?"

"You help me scout the manor," Harry said. "Your Auror training will be useful for identifying defensive positions and potential ambush points."

"I thought you said Fleur was going with you," Nym pointed out.

"You both are," Harry clarified. "Three sets of eyes are better than two. Amelia is to coordinate with the people in the ministry. The rest continue training with Evelyn. And Daphne?"

Daphne raised a questioning eyebrow.

"You coordinate everything here," Harry said. "Make sure everyone knows their assignments. Keep track of our progress. You're good at organization and planning. I need you managing things from this end."

Daphne looked like she wanted to argue but nodded instead. "Fine. But I want detailed reports from everyone. No surprises."

"Agreed," Harry said. "Communication is crucial. We can't afford miscommunication or people going off script."

"When do we leave for the manor?" Fleur asked.

"This afternoon," Harry said. "After lunch. We'll apparate to the general area and approach on foot. Just reconnaissance today. We observe, we note everything, and we leave without engaging."

"And if Bellatrix is there?" Nym asked.

"We leave without engaging," Harry repeated firmly. "I'm not fighting her until we're properly prepared. That means knowing the terrain, understanding her defenses, and having a solid plan."

"You're being very cautious about this," Tracey observed.

"Because Bellatrix deserves caution," Harry said. "Greyback was dangerous but ultimately just a beast. Bellatrix is a trained dueler with decades of experience. She's fought in the first war, survived Azkaban, and remained loyal to Voldemort through everything. She won't go down easily."

"All the more reason to hit her hard and fast," Nym argued.

"Hard and fast after proper planning," Harry corrected. "Not before."

The discussion continued for another hour, refining details and coordinating schedules. By the time they finished, everyone knew their assignments for the next few days.

Harry stood, stretching muscles that were pleasantly tired from the morning's activities. "Alright. Let's get to work. We have a lot to do and limited time to do it."

The group dispersed, each person moving to begin their assigned tasks.

'I still don't understand the need for all this pomp and show,' he heard Maria's exasperated voice in his mind. 'You don't need any of this. Like the Carrows, you could storm this manor, kill everyone without breaking a sweat like that bald fraud, and come back home to some more pussy. You don't lack in that department. But no, you have to pretend like this is some sort of military exercise that needs all that planning, recon, and careful steps. Even last night, you could've killed all those werewolves, including Greyback, before they even knew you were there. But no, you had to play this little game of yours.'

Harry stifled a sigh. *'You already know why I'm doing things like this.'*

'Yeah. And it still doesn't make a whole lot of sense.'

'Bonds formed during a war and in a battlefield are for life, Maria. Nothing can break those. You can already see it in the way Amelia's behavior toward me has changed. I couldn't have just seduced her into my bed and expected it to go well. No, some things need to happen a certain way.'

'I still feel you can form these bonds you're so fond of by fucking them senseless.'

'That's the next step. And I can't just blaze through those pricks and be a problem solver. They need to become capable enough, to see their fair share of battles and plannings so that they can stand by my side in the future and tackle whatever issues might arrive down the line. I take charge where I need to, but I can't keep doing things on my own.'

'Let's agree to disagree. Okay?'

Harry tutted silently and caught Amelia's eye as she stood. She gave him a small nod of approval. Harry returned her nod and watched her as she walked away with Evelyn.

He'd seen the looks they'd exchanged this morning and he wondered what that was all about.

Finally, he also made his way out of the room and once again, he thought about everything that was happening. They were building something here. A team. An organization. People who trusted each other and worked together toward a common goal, getting stronger and more capable with every day and every new mission.

Maria could remain skeptical of his approach. He knew it was the way to go about things. It was progress, and it was exactly what they needed to win this war and to build the future he had envisioned.

To be continued...