

Chapter 10

Harry stared into the swirling midst of the orb on his desk, lost in thought as the Floo burst to life. He didn't need to look up to know who it was. He'd been waiting for the man for over an hour.

The man took two steps into the room and then stopped, an oppressive silence settling over the office.

"Why?" Harry asked, finally looking away from the orb and into the troubled blue eyes of the man he had counted as a mentor and friend. "Why didn't you just tell me?"

"I did not wish to burden you," Dumbledore said, taking the seat across from him. "I wished for you to enjoy your childhood."

Harry snorted derisively, "My childhood ended the day you left me with the Dursleys. You should've told me. I had a right to know."

"When?" Dumbledore asked, his shoulders slumping tiredly. "When you first returned to our world, moments after learning the truth of your parents? After you had returned from the Chamber of Secrets with young Ginny, triumphant against impossible odds? Should I have told you moments after discovering the truth about Sirius, only for him to leave that very night? Or, perhaps I should've told you at the conclusion of the Tournament, whilst you lay in the Hospital Wing, battered and beaten – but once again triumphant? I spent many sleepless nights contemplating each of those scenarios and many, many more in between. Alas, I could never bring myself to do it. How do you tell a young man who has suffered so much – a young man you care for like a grandson – that he is destined to suffer more?"

"You still should've told me!" Harry yelled, his anger bubbling to the surface. "I could've done things differently! I – I could've studied more or trained hard!"

“And what would that have changed?” Dumbledore asked, remaining calm in the face of Harry’s shouting. “What spell could you have used to stop a Basilisk? What magic could you have learned to stop Lord Voldemort any of the times you faced him? Your strength has never been your talent with your wand – skilled though you undoubtedly are. Your greatest weapon has always been your heart. Your strength of character, your strength of will, your unwavering sense of right and wrong. That! That has always been your greatest strength and what has seen you through so many harrowing trials. And, I believe, it is that which will see you through to defeating Lord Voldemort once and for all. Not something as fleeting as power.”

“What the hell does that even mean!?” Harry yelled, dropping his head into his hands and gripping his hair tightly. “How the hell is my *character* going to help me beat Voldemort if I don’t have the spells to fight him?”

“Voldemort has decades more experience than you and has delved so far into the depths of dark magic that, even given the time, you could never hope to equal him with a wand,” Dumbledore said.

“So, I’m screwed,” Harry said defeatedly.

“Certainly not,” Dumbledore replied, his mustache twitching.

Harry looked up and glared, “For one, can you just give me a straight answer?”

“I’m afraid it’s not that simple,” Dumbledore told him. “I don’t know how you will defeat Voldemort, but I find it highly unlikely in the extreme that you will be able to out-duel him. If you wish to train, then by all means, please do so. I’m sure Ms. Granger would be more than happy to assist you in that endeavor.”

“Why didn’t you train me?” Harry asked, his frustration bleeding to the surface. “I mean, you’ve had years to get me ready-”

“And teach you what?” Dumbledore asked, raising a bushy white eyebrow. “Harry, you have only just finished learning the basics of magic. Any of the spells I could teach you that might be useful in a duel against Voldemort would just as easily kill you from the slightest mistake. I may have put off informing you of the Prophecy to spare you the burden of what you must do, but I would not intentionally hinder your chances. If there was more I could do to help you, I would be doing it.”

Harry felt chastised by the Headmaster’s look, but the anger burning in his chest allowed him to ignore it.

“So, what am I supposed to do then?” he asked bitterly. “Just wait for Voldemort to come after me and hope I figure something out?”

The Headmaster hesitated, and Harry immediately picked up on it. Their gazes locked, and he felt an odd tingle behind his eyes. Then, Dumbledore looked away, and Harry blinked. Something had happened, but he didn’t know what.

“There was another reason I hesitated to tell you of the prophecy,” Dumbledore said after a moment. “Last year, you told me of some dreams you had. Dreams of real people and real places that you should’ve had no way of knowing about. Do you remember?”

“Yes,” Harry said softly, a sinking feeling in his stomach.

“Have you had any more dreams like that?” Dumbledore asked, his eyes watching him intently.

For a moment, Harry considered lying. A petulant part of him wanted to get back at him for the secrets the Headmaster had kept. But in the end, he knew it wouldn’t do him any good.

“Just one,” he said after a moment. “For the last few weeks I’ve been dreaming about the door leading to the Department of Mysteries. I didn’t even know where the door led until this morning.”

Dumbledore nodded as if his answer was expected, a hand stroking his beard lightly.

"I've come to believe there is a connection between you and Lord Voldemort," he said softly. "One that connects your minds. The visions you saw last year were from him. His weakened state allowed you to inadvertently enter his mind during your sleep. Your visions of the door are more troubling. Now that he has returned to his full powers, it can only mean he wished for you to see it. Most likely in an attempt for you to get the Prophecy for him."

"He knows about it?" Harry asked worriedly.

"I'm afraid so," Dumbledore said. "The Prophecy was given to me when I was interviewing Professor Trelawney for the Divinations post. Unfortunately, I neglected to ward the room. In my defense, I hardly expected to hear a prophecy of such magnitude. A Death Eater heard the first half before he was thrown out by the owner."

"Snape," Harry spat.

In a single moment, it all came together.

"Severus has done everything he can to make up for his mistake," Dumbledore said.

A fury like he had never felt before burned through Harry's veins as he glared at Dumbledore.

"Make up for it?" he hissed. "He's the reason Voldemort went after my parents! He's the reason they're dead!"

"Harry--"

"And you!" Harry spat. "You let him treat me like shit! You let him bully me for years!"

“It was my hope that Severus would eventually let go of his dislike of you,” Dumbledore sighed. “It appears that hope was in vain. However, there are reasons Severus acts the way he does.”

“Yeah, like what?” Harry asked venomously. “His pathological need to make everyone around him as miserable as he is. How can you trust him? How could you make him a professor after what he did? He should be rotting in Azkaban!”

“Harry, please, let me explain,” Dumbledore said, gesturing for him to calm down. “As I’m sure you’re aware by now, Severus and your father did not get along at school. I must take responsibility for some of that. I allowed James’ pranks to go too far on more than one occasion. However, his hatred is based on more than just a schoolyard rivalry. You see, when Severus first came to Hogwarts, he really only had one close friend. Lily Evans.”

“What!?” Harry asked, feeling like the bottom of his stomach had just dropped out.

“Indeed,” Dumbledore nodded. “They grew up next door to one another. One day, Severus saw your mother performing magic in front of Petunia. He told her all about the wizarding world, and they quickly became close friends. They stayed close even after reaching Hogwarts and being sorted into different houses. As you can imagine, neither of their housemates were happy to see a Gryffindor and Slytherin getting along. Over the years, they slowly grew apart. Lucius Malfoy seduced Severus with promises of power and a better life. He began spending more time with people that openly despised Muggleborns, straining their friendship considerably.

“Just after their OWLs, things finally came to a head. James and Severus got into a confrontation, and your mother decided to intervene. Instead of accepting her help, Severus grew angry and called her something deeply offensive. I believe Mr. Malfoy has used that slur against Ms. Granger more than once. I don’t think it was the name itself that truly hurt Lily. I believe it was the fact that she saw her childhood friend heading down a dark path that caused her to end their friendship. Severus was devastated. He tried to apologize countless times, but she never forgave him. Of course, as most teenagers tend to do, he sought to put the blame on anyone other than himself. He already hated your father, so convincing himself that it was James’ fault was little trouble.

"Another year passed, and while James began to mature, Severus sank deeper into Voldemort's grasp. During their seventh year, your parents started dating. For Severus, seeing the woman he loved with the man he'd grown to hate more than any other just drove him further into a world of darkness. So, a little over a year later, when Severus overheard part of a Prophecy concerning the Dark Lord, he immediately ran to tell him. It didn't take Voldemort long to determine that two boys fit the first part of the Prophecy. You and Neville Longbottom. When Severus realized the danger he'd put your mother in, he came to me. Begged me to protect her. From that day onwards, Severus has done everything he can to protect you and bring an end to Voldemort once and for all."

"Bullshit!" Harry spat.

He'd never been more angry than he was at that moment.

"Snape has done nothing but go out of his way to make my life miserable since the day I set foot in Hogwarts!" he continued furiously. "So, what? I'm supposed to feel sorry for him now because he chose to rape and murder instead of being friends with my mum?"

"Harry-"

"Get out," Harry growled. "Get out!"

"I understand you're upset, but there's more we need to discuss," Dumbledore said, still infuriatingly calm. "As I was trying to explain, Voldemort may be able to look into your mind. Now that you know the Prophecy, it's imperative that you learn Occlumency."

"What does it matter? He already knows half of it," Harry said. "So what if he finds out the rest?"

He knew he was being petulant, he didn't want Voldemort in his head, but at that moment, he didn't care.

"It would be disastrous," Dumbledore said. "Should Voldemort learn you are the only one that can defeat him, how do you think he would respond?"

Harry knew exactly what he would do. He'd lose all fear of being killed. He'd start taking over Britain and kill anyone that got in his way.

"Fine," he said. "I'll find someone to teach me."

Dumbledore looked like he was going to protest but stopped himself.

"Just make sure whoever you find is someone you can trust," he said. "We must keep Voldemort from learning the full Prophecy. While we are on the subject, who else knows the contents?"

"Hermione, Penny, Daphne, and Amelia," Harry replied.

Dumbledore frowned, stroking his beard, "Are you sure Ms. Greengrass can be trusted with such information?"

"If someone had told me how important it was, I might've thought about who I had in my office at the time," Harry glared. "But yes, I trust her. She even gave me a vow not to talk about it without my permission. She said it was as much to protect her as it was to protect me."

Dumbledore hummed thoughtfully, "Very well. I shall trust your judgment." Standing, he smoothed out his robes. "I know you've learned many painful truths today, Harry, and I know you are angry with me. Rightfully so. However, I promise you I will do everything in my power to ensure you defeat Voldemort and live a long and happy life."

Watching him walk to the Floo, Harry's fury came back with a vengeance. He wanted to ask many questions, but he was too angry and wanted him gone too badly to open his mouth. The moment the Headmaster disappeared in a flash of emerald flame, Harry grabbed his half-filled glass of Firewhiskey from his desk and hurled it into the fireplace with a scream.

“You son of a bitch!” he shouted, panting furiously.

Dropping back down into his chair, he dropped his head in his hands, tears of frustration, anger, and sadness threatening to fall from his eyes.

“Why the fuck does this keep happening to me?” he asked miserably.

Lost in thought, he didn’t know how long he sat there before someone knocked on his door. With a wave of his wand, he dropped the privacy wards.

“Who is it?” he croaked.

The door cracked open, and Hermione stuck her head in.

“Harry?” she called softly.

Taking one look at his face, she didn’t even bother to wait for a response before rushing and pulling him into a tight hug. Harry hugged her back, soaking in the comfort of her embrace. A moment later, as she pulled back, Amelia, Penny, and Daphne entered his office and closed the door behind them. Penny instantly took Hermione’s place, sitting on the arm of the chair as her arms wrapped around him. Not caring about their audience, Harry pulled her into his lap and held her tightly.

“I take it your talk with Dumbledore didn’t go well?” Amelia asked.

Snorting, Harry told them everything he’d learned. They listened silently, an array of emotions flitting across their faces. As he finished his retelling, Amelia poured several drinks before downing hers in a single swig.

"Alright, let's deal with things in order of importance," Amelia said. "First, Occlumency."

"What is Occlumency?" Harry asked.

"It's a technique to magically protect your mind," she told him. "It's often used to defend against Legilimency, the art of reading a person's mind. Learning Occlumency is a very personal process. Whoever teaches you needs to know both and will have free access to your mind. Given the risk of someone stumbling across the Prophecy, it would be best if I were to teach you myself."

Harry nodded before a thought occurred to him.

"Er, the things you see in my head... they can't be used in court, can they?" he asked tentatively.

Amelia smirked, "No. And frankly, Potter, I don't care what laws you've broken. I know you well enough by now to know whatever you've done, it was for a very good reason."

"It's not me I'm worried about," he muttered, resisting the urge to glance at Hermione.

"I have more important things to worry about than getting your friends in trouble," Amelia told him. "We'll start in a couple of days. You're too emotionally exhausted to get any benefit out of it right now. We'll work out a schedule when you go back to Hogwarts."

"Is that allowed?" Hermione asked.

"Yes," Amelia replied. "Any student can hire professional tutors if they wish."

"Could I learn too?" Hermione asked. "If it's not too much trouble?"

"You can come with Harry, and I'll help you if I have time, but you have to understand I'll be focusing on Harry," Amelia told her.

"I should find a tutor for Potions, too," Harry said. "I don't think I could spend time in Snape's class without wanting to kill him."

"I'll find one," Amelia said firmly. "Susan will be joining you as well. I don't want her anywhere near that bastard if I can help it."

"Don't you have enough to get him fired?" Daphne asked. "If the Wizengamot learned he was responsible for what happened to the Potters, they'd be out for blood, especially with how popular Potter is right now."

"You're right, but there's more to it than that," Amelia said. "As much as I'd love to see Snape rotting in a cell, Dumbledore keeps him around for a reason."

"He's a spy," Harry said.

Amelia nodded, "Unfortunately, it's a necessary evil. It's virtually impossible to get a spy within You-Know-Who's ranks."

"Do you really think we can trust him?" Penny asked, her fingers caressing Harry's arm lightly.

"Now that I know his motivations, I'm much more inclined to believe he's against Voldemort," Amelia said. "I always wondered why he suddenly switched sides. Make no mistake, that man isn't on our side. We just happen to have a common enemy."

"You know, I never liked Snape," Daphne said. "His clear favoritism makes the other houses resent us. It's ironic that he regrets becoming a Death Eater, but all of his actions as our Head of House drive his students in that same direction."

"I think we're all missing the bigger picture here," Harry said. "How the hell am I supposed to beat Voldemort?"

Penny tightened her arm around him, and Hermione squeezed his hand as everyone fell silent.

"I think there's more to this than we know," Amelia said after a long moment. "Dumbledore has always kept his cards close to his vest. I have a feeling he'll tell you what he has up his sleeve once you learn Occlumency."

"And if he doesn't have anything?" Harry asked, his heart hammering in his chest.

"Then we fight as hard as we can for as long as we can," Amelia said.

"Right," Harry said, licking his lips in thought. "Right, okay. Here's what we're going to do. For my last week here, I want to focus on cleaning up the Ministry, securing Azkaban, making possession of the Dark Mark a crime, and ensuring we have a competent Minister to take over after I leave office."

"That's a lot to do in a week," Amelia said.

"I just need to get it started," Harry said, giving her a pointed look. "It'll be up to the next Minister to see it through."

Amelia sighed and poured herself another drink.

"I know I'm going to regret this," she said, taking a sip. "I'll run for Minister on one condition."

"Name it," Harry said.

"I want your word that you'll look out for Susan if anything happens to me," Amelia said, her grey-blue eyes boring into his. "I do not want to see the Bones line end."

"I would do that anyways," Harry said. "But if it makes you feel better, I promise to look after Susan if anything happens to you."

"Thank you," Amelia said gratefully before sighing and getting to her feet. "We'll talk more once you've had time to digest everything."

Walking around the desk, she reached over Hermione and clasped his shoulder.

"No matter what some stupid prophecy says, you're not alone," she said firmly.

"No, you're not," Hermione agreed.

Penny kissed his cheek while Daphne nodded.

"You don't have to do this, Daphne," Harry said, feeling guilty for drawing her into this mess.

"Don't flatter yourself," she scoffed. "I'm not doing this for you, Potter. Not good will come from following that madman, and I'm sure as hell not going to sit back and hope for the best. Now that I know the truth, I'm going to stay right here and make sure you win. You're stuck with me. Deal with it."

Harry smiled, "Thank you."

As Amelia took her leave, Hermione hugged Daphne gratefully. He chuckled as the normally unflappable Slytherin blushed as Hermione held the hug longer than usual. Slowly, the smile fell from his face as his thoughts turned back to the Prophecy. Suddenly, Penny climbed off of his

lap. When he looked up at her questioningly, she smiled and took his hand, pulling him to his feet. As she led him over toward the couch, she shared a glance with Hermione.

“We’ll give you two some time alone,” Hermione said quickly.

Grabbing Daphne’s hand, she pulled her out of the office and closed the door. Turning to Penny with a curious look, she smiled softly as they took a seat.

“Are you okay?” she asked gently.

Harry sighed and stared down at his hand while Penny laced her finger through his.

“I’m... scared,” he admitted softly, watching the way the skin on the back of her hand creased when he ran his thumb across it. “When I fought Voldemort in the graveyard... he just toyed with me. He was so powerful. It was terrifying. I knew I was going to die. I *knew* it. I still don’t really understand what happened with our wands or how I managed to survive.”

“But you did,” Penny said. “And you did so much more than that. You made it back to Hogwarts, became the bloody Minister for Magic, and warned everyone that You-Know-Who is back. Look at everything that you’ve done in just three weeks. You’ve arrested most of his Death Eaters, you’ve revitalized the DMLE – you’ve done so much more than anyone could’ve ever expected. And you’re missing the most important point. You did beat him. You beat him in your first year, in your second, and you beat him in the graveyard. It doesn’t matter if you know how you did it. It just matters that you did. And I know you’ll do it again.”

Curling her fingers under his chin, Penny tilted his head up and kissed him. Her full, soft lips molded around his as she ran her hand over his chest. Shifting around, she swung her leg over his and straddled his lap as she kissed him more passionately. Just as Harry started to feel a little hot under the collar, she pulled back, flushed and smiling.

“Lock the door,” she whispered breathily.

Pulling out his wand, Harry gave it a twirl. The locks audibly clicked into place, and then the door glowed blue briefly, the piracy wards falling into place. Reaching up, Penny combed her fingers through his hair. It felt so soothing that Harry closed his eyes and sighed.

"You've been carrying so much weight on your shoulders for so long," Penny said softly. "You need to take your mind off things for a bit. Take some time to relax."

"I wish I could," Harry mumbled.

"Then it's a good thing you have me," Penny smiled.

Shrugging off her robe, Harry licked his suddenly dry lips as she began unbuttoning her blouse. With each one she undid, more and more of her creamy, pale skin was revealed to his hungry gaze. Her large breasts were cradled in a white bra, the garment pushing them together and creating a long, deep line of cleavage. A shrug of her shoulders sent the blouse fluttering carelessly to the floor behind her.

"You're so beautiful, Penny," Harry whispered, caressing her bare stomach with a feather light touch.

Smiling, she reached behind her back and unclasped her bra. Harry swallowed thickly as she slowly slid the straps down her arms. Butterflies fluttered wildly in his stomach. He'd never seen a real pair of breasts before, and Penny had a body that he thought rivaled even Fleur. Sure, Penny wasn't as breathtakingly beautiful as the French part Veela, but she had that girl next door look that he found incredibly cute.

Lowering her arms, Penny's breasts bounced into view and took Harry's breath away. They were, in a word, perfect. The perfect size, the perfect shape, with perfect wide, pink areolas and perfect red nipples. Her expansive pale globes were smooth and blemish free, save for a couple of red marks from where her bra had dug into her skin. Harry knew he was gaping like an idiot, but he just couldn't help himself.

Penny giggled, causing her breasts to jiggle alluringly. Reaching down, she pulled his hands from her hips and placed them on her breasts. With a contented hum, she started combing her fingers through his hair. Tentatively, Harry caressed her full, soft mounds. A light squeeze caused her to moan softly and her hips to rock against his straining erection.

Wrapping her arms around his head, Penny pulled him forward, burying his face in her chest as she continued to gyrate her hips. Groaning, Harry grabbed her hips, pulling her more firmly against his erection while he kissed, sucked, and licked at her amazing breasts.

“Harry,” Penny moaned.

Shifting in his lap, she grabbed her dress and bunched it up, exposing her pale thighs and allowing her to press her panty covered mound directly against his raging excitement. With a harsh roll of her hips, she gripped his hair, pulled his head back, and kissed him hungrily. They both moaned as they bucked against each other, only a couple layers of cloth preventing them from rutting like animals. Harry’s hands returned to her bare breasts, his touch much firmer than before. Penny gasped and shuddered above him when he took one of her hard nipples between his fingers and gave it a squeeze.

“Harder,” she panted.

Harry did as she asked, pinching her nipple and giving it a light tug. A trembling gasp left her lips as she tilted her head back and ground against him desperately. The friction caused him to hiss and buck up into her. His cheeks flushed with embarrassment when he realized he was getting dangerously close to a climax.

“Penny,” he panted, “I’m...”

Tilting her head forward to meet his eyes with a lustful stare, Penny ground against him again,

“Me too,” she said breathlessly. “Cum with me.”

Pressing her forehead against his, they stared into each other's eyes as they bucked desperately, their movements gradually losing their coordination. Harry was fascinated by the look on her beautiful face. Their breath mingled as he dropped his hands down to her bum, pulling her down hard each time she rolled her hips. He tried to hold on as long as he could, but all too soon, it became too much, and he tumbled over the edge.

"Shit," Harry hissed.

Penny shuddered as he pulsed against her mound. With a gasp, her eyes slammed shut, and her mouth hung open while a series of breathless grunts were forced from her lungs. It took Harry a moment to realize she was cumming, her face screwed up in an almost painful grimace. Through the haze of his climax, he was enthralled by the way she shook against him. It looked like her body was vibrating from how good she felt. Knowing that he'd brought her to that point filled him with a sense of pride.

Eventually, Penny sagged against him as they both panted for breath. Burying her face in the crook of his neck, she nuzzled his skin with a soft moan, peppering light kisses along his pulse point. Harry closed his eyes, savoring the relaxed, intimate moment while caressing her smooth back.