

Chapter 46

Harry grew restless as he waited impatiently for the solstice to arrive. With little to do around the castle besides avoid classes between bi-weekly DA lessons, and with Voldemort remaining nerve-rackingly quiet, he took to leaving the castle as much as possible.

Fortunately, his first excuse to leave without earning McGonagall's ire came early Monday morning with a Wizengamot meeting. Harry hadn't intended to actually attend. He merely wanted to use it as an excuse to avoid classes, but Charlus sent him an owl Sunday night, urging him to be there. So, early Monday morning, while the rest of his classmates were still wiping the sleep from their eyes and wandering slowly down to the Great Hall, he threw on his plum-colored robes and made his way to Dumbledore's office, hoping he hadn't left yet. It would be a lot more convenient to take his Floo than to walk to the edge of the wards and Apparate to London.

The gargoyle guarding the office leaped aside as he approached, and Harry gratefully rode the revolving staircase up to the headmaster's office.

"Ah, Harry," Dumbledore smiled, wearing a set of black robes covered in swirling, purple and blue galaxies. "I was wondering if you'd be joining me this morning."

"I hadn't planned on it," Harry admitted. "But Charlus said I should attend."

"And he's quite right," the old man nodded. "Today, we'll be taking the vote on whether to declare a state of war against Voldemort and his Death Eaters."

"Oh," Harry said, surprised.

"I think it has a good chance of passing," he added, smiling. "Charlus and his allies have been pushing the issue heavily for months now. Quite a few important names have come out in support, including some that I wouldn't have expected. Unfortunately, he's been quite tight-lipped about how he managed to convince them. Now, shall we?"

Harry nodded, snagged a Peppermint Humbug from the candy dish on the headmaster's desk as he passed, and popped it into his mouth. He was mildly surprised and grateful that instead of leading him to the Floo, Dumbledore walked over to the corner of his office, where an Any Mirror stood in the corner. They stepped seamlessly through the new mirrors mounted along the walls between the Ministry Floos and walked over to the guard desk.

Thankfully, the guard seemed to be in a chipper mood, so it didn't take as long as it usually did. Once they were past security and in the golden elevator, they rode it down to the lower level and made their way to courtroom ten.

The room was already packed with bodies and filled with the constant murmur of voices. Even the gallery was full of reporters and curious witches and wizards. Dumbledore was quickly pulled into a conversation with Dadelus Diggle and Tiberius Ogden. Left on his own, Harry scanned the crowd for Charlus. He found him seated on a bench alongside Jonas Longbottom, Francine Abbot, and Damien Greengrass. David Bones and William Prewitt sat just behind them, huddled in quiet conversation. Quickly, he made his way over and took the seat next to Charlus.

"Morning," he said.

The group responded in kind.

"Glad you could make it," Charlus smiled. "It should be an interesting meeting."

He sat back with his arms crossed over his chest with a slightly smug air about him.

"You seem confident," Harry said with a questioning look.

"Everything's in place," he replied cryptically.

Before Harry could question him further, Dumbledore took to the podium and started the meeting. He spent the first several minutes going through the standard housekeeping. Despite the banal announcements and legalities, the courtroom atmosphere was heavy with growing tension. Everyone knew why they were there, and that the outcome, whatever it was, would have a profound effect on the future of the country. But through it all, Charlus's confidence never waned.

"I believe it's time to begin today's agenda," Dumbledore said from the podium. "We'll begin with the proposed declaration of war against Voldemort and his forces, known as Death Eaters. Are there any further arguments to be made?"

Pausing, he scanned the crowd over his half-moon glasses. Behind him, Minister Bagnold surveyed the room, her face a serious, inscrutable mask. Not a single hand was raised.

"Very well," Dumbledore continued. "All those in favor, raise your wands."

Harry and everyone around him lifted their wands and lit the tips. While the clerk was performing a count, he tried to look around to gauge the result for himself. It was difficult to tell. With all the arms around him raised, he couldn't see that far on his own side of the courtroom, and on the side across from him, most of the darker families glared and kept their wands firmly in their laps.

The clerk scrawled on a piece of parchment and quickly handed it to Dumbledore. He gave it a quick glance, and his lips twitched momentarily under his beard.

"By a vote of thirty to twenty-five, the measure passes."

"Yes!" Harry hissed under his breath.

David clapped his shoulders from behind and gave them a celebratory squeeze while Francine reached over and patted Charlus on the knee. The courtroom broke into an excited murmur.

“Would you like to say a few words, Minister?” Dumbledore’s voice carried over the din.

People fell silent as Bagnold climbed gracefully to her feet and smoothed out her robes.

“A heavy moment indeed, to be forced to declare war against one of our own,” she said solemnly. “But the threat cannot be ignored any longer. The Ministry will use everything at our disposal to defeat You-Know-Who and his Death Eaters as quickly as possible. As Minister for Magic, in accordance with the War Powers Act of 1743, I declare the Dark Mark as a symbol of opposition. Let it be known now, all those who willingly bear his mark have marked themselves as the enemy of wizardkind. I am commanding our brave Aurors to rid us of this threat once and for all and bring us into a brighter day. A day when our citizens need not fear the forces of darkness. For more than three hundred years, this government has stood against the evils of the magical world, never wavering, never faltering, and today, we will once again take up the fight.”

The courtroom burst into enthusiastic applause, but Harry merely clapped politely. Pretty words were one thing, but he wanted to see effective action. Making bearing the Dark Mark a crime was a good start, but they’d need a lot more if they wanted to actually stop the Death Eaters.

Still, despite his worries, today was a resounding victory.

“Thank you for those inspiring words, Minister,” Dumbledore smiled. “Now, back to business.”

Harry’s mood quickly took a turn when he realized he still had four hours of governmental work to get through.

The moment the meeting was over, he rushed out of the courtroom and took the elevator to the Atrium. Rather than returning to school, where he would be bored out of his mind learning spells that he could cast in his sleep, Harry took the nearest mirror to the Wolf’s Den.

Maggie looked up from her paperwork as he stepped into the office and greeted him with a glowing smile.

"Hello, dear."

Standing, she walked around and pulled him into a hug.

"I didn't expect to see you again so soon," she said, stepping back and holding him at arm's length with a slight frown. "Is everything alright?"

"Everything's fine," Harry assured her and indicated his robes. "I had a Wizengamot meeting today. How's everything here? Anything I should know about?"

"Oh, nothing you need to worry yourself about," Maggie said, patting him on the shoulder and returning to her seat. "The second enchanting building is finished. Richard put Josh in charge of organizing the new equipment. Some of the enchanters are tutoring him in charms so he can do some of the enchantments when it's finished."

"That's great," Harry beamed.

"It is," Maggie smiled. "I can't ever thank you enough for everything you've done. But, besides that, there's not much going on. It's been pretty quiet around here since you returned to school. You don't have anything planned that I should know about, do you?"

"Nothing planned, no," he smiled. "I'm just going to have a look around and see how things are going. Thanks, Maggie."

"Make sure you keep up with your studies!" Maggie called after him.

"I will!" Harry yelled back.

Stepping through the back door of the office, he paused and gazed across the lawn. The Werewolf enclosure had been completely removed now that it was no longer needed. The

greenhouses were gone, too. They had been moved closer to the office, and in their place sat a red brick building identical to the one next to it. The only part of the property that hadn't seen a significant change was the house. It sat where it always had, looking vacant and lifeless.

Curious if it was still being used, Harry made his way over. The front door was unlocked and swung open when he turned the handle.

"Hello!" he called.

He waited several seconds, but there was no answer. Stepping inside, he closed the door behind him and looked around. He found a few signs of life in the living room. There was a recent copy of *Witch Broom* on the coffee table, and the dying embers of a fire still glowed under a pile of white ash in the hearth. In the kitchen, he found a pair of dirty plates and a used teacup sitting in the sink.

At least one person was still living there, but it wasn't as occupied as it had been just a few months earlier.

Slowly making his way to the stairs, he climbed to the second floor. The first three bedrooms he passed looked like they hadn't been used in a while. Before he reached the end of the hallway, he passed the bathroom and paused. The bathroom door was wide open, and a lacy, semi-transparent black bra hung from the doorknob. Shaking his head, he continued on to the last room on the left, and the only door that was fully closed.

Harry raised his hand and knocked softly twice. There was no response, so he eased the door open. Inside, he discovered the owner of the bra. Adriana lay sprawled out on the bed, her legs tangled in the wrinkled sheets. Smiling, he checked his watch.

"Do you always sleep past eleven on a Monday morning?" he asked loudly.

Adriana jolted awake. Blinking the sleep out of her bleary eyes, she glared at him and flopped her head back down on the pillow.

"I work nights," she muttered.

Harry blinked and looked at her curiously.

"Doing what?"

"Guard duty," she told him. "John's worried Death Eaters might attack while you're not here. Now shut up and let me sleep."

Harry backed out of the room, closed the door, and decided to go find John. He found him in the greenhouses, directing Thor to move large bags of fertilizer.

"Morning, John," he greeted.

"Harry," John said, spinning around with a wide smile. "Didn't expect to see you today."

"I had a Wizengamot meeting this morning and didn't feel like going back to class," Harry admitted. "I checked on the house when I got here. It looked pretty empty. Is Adriana the only one staying there?"

"Right now, she is," John said. "Most of the Werewolves-or, former Werewolves-moved out after they were cured. A few of them still aren't properly settled and stay for a week or two before finding another place, but they never stay for long. I'm not sure why Adriana's stayed, but I didn't think it was a problem."

"It's not," Harry assured him. "There's not much point to a house if no one lives in it. She mentioned you had her on guard duty. You know the wards I put up will repel a small army for an hour."

"I know," John said, "and it's not that I don't trust them, but Robert has a second shift working nights until the new workshop is up and running to keep up with all the mirror sales. This place never really closes. It's more to make the workers feel safe than anything else. Besides, it gives Adriana a job to do while she's learning the enchantments."

"Fair enough, I suppose," Harry smiled. "I should go check in with Robert while I'm here. Do you need anything from me?"

"No, I think we have everything," John smiled.

Harry gave him a wave and ambled over to the workshop. It was incredibly busy inside. Workers rushed from one place to another with practiced efficiency. He struggled to stay out of their way as he searched for Robert. He found him in the back, inspecting the finished mirrors before they were moved over to Mirror Image.

A Transportation Mirror sat at the very back of the workshop. It connected to a mirror behind the counter at Mirror Image. It was positioned to give customers in the store a perfect view of the manufacturing process before the finished product passed through the mirror and was stocked on the shelves. Harry didn't know who came up with the idea. Robert was too busy for him to ask many questions, but he thought it was great.

He didn't stay in the workshop long. His presence was more of a distraction than helpful, so he wandered back outside. He spent some time walking around the edge of the property to check the wards. They were in as good a shape as when he'd cast them.

With nothing else to do but let everyone continue their work, Harry was considering going to visit Sylvia and Amanda at home when he spotted Adriana through the kitchen window. Wandering back over to the house, he decided to check on her before leaving. Quickly slipping inside, he walked to the kitchen and found her at the sink with a steaming mug in her hand. She was still in her pajamas, an oversized T-shirt, and a pair of flannel trousers.

"Sorry for waking you," he said.

“Eh? Oh, it’s fine,” Adriana replied, waving off the apology. “What are you doing here anyway?”

“Avoiding classes,” he admitted with a smile. “Just thought I’d check on things here. Is everything alright?”

“Fine,” she shrugged. “Most of the Werewolves moved out now that they’re cured.”

“I heard. It must be nice to have this big house all to yourself.”

“It’s actually pretty boring,” Adriana admitted.

Moving next to her, Harry leaned back against the counter and crossed his arms over his chest.

“So, what made you want to stay?” he asked curiously.

“It didn’t make much sense to rent a place of my own when I spend most of my day here working or learning enchantments,” she told him.

There was an awkward silence, but Harry felt that she had more to say, so he stayed quiet.

“Besides,” she continued after a few seconds, “I like it here. This is the first place that’s felt like home since the day I was bitten.”

Harry smiled.

“I’m glad,” he said. “Feel free to stay as long as you like.”

“Thanks,” Adriana smiled.

They lapsed into another brief silence, but this time it held none of the awkwardness.

“Are you free for a bit?” she asked suddenly.

“Yeah, why?” Harry asked.

“Good,” she said, setting her mug in the sink. “I really need a good shag.”

Harry blinked in surprise. He certainly hadn’t been expecting that. Before he could think of a response, Adriana dropped to her knees and opened his trousers. She dragged the waistband down to his thighs and took the entirety of his limp length into her mouth. The teasing of her tongue and a light suction caused him to rapidly harden. Pretty soon, she could no longer fit all of him in her mouth. Staring up at him, she tried to keep as much of it as she could, but as he reached the peak of his growth, his engorged head hit the back of her throat and caused her to gag.

Adriana pulled back and wiped a string of saliva from the corner of her mouth. In one smooth move, she stood and whipped her shirt over her head. Harry caught only a brief glimpse of her bare torso and large, firm breasts before she pressed herself against him, and their lips met.

She tasted like coffee.

As they both tore at his clothes, frustrated by the multiple layers, their kiss gradually went from heated to frenzied.

Ridding Adriana of her trousers was much easier. Harry lifted onto the kitchen table and simply yanked them down her tattoo-covered legs. He could smell her arousal and see it glistening between her legs. Her legs wrapped around his waist as he stepped forward and lined himself up with her entrance. He hilted himself in her sweltering depths with a single thrust, making both of them groan.

Harry grasped one of her breasts, teasing and lightly twisting the silver bar that pierced her pink nipple while he began to thrust slowly. Adriana bit her lip and arched her back. Bracing his free hand on the table, he leaned down and took the other nipple between his lips. She moaned under him and threaded her fingers through his hair. Shifting his gaze up to her beautiful face, he took her pebbled nipple between his teeth and bit it sharply. A hiss left her lips while her hand tightened until his scalp stung.

With a tug that caused his teeth to scrape her sensitive skin, she dragged his mouth up to her and kissed him passionately. Her nails raked down his back, leaving behind burning trails. She gripped his ass and wordlessly urged him to fuck her harder. Straightening up, Harry drew his hips back and gave her a sharp, powerful thrust.

“Yes!” Adriana hissed.

Harry thrust sharply again and again, steadily increasing his tempo. The sound of his pelvis slapping against her thighs filled the kitchen. His right hand trailed slowly up her body, pausing briefly to roughly grope her bouncing breast before continuing up to her throat. He squeezed firmly, restricting her breath but not stopping it. Adriana bucked her hips, her nails digging deeply into his back.

Harry fucked her harder and faster until he reached a frenzied pace. The table creaked under them in protest. Slowly, he tightened his grip until he completely cut off her breath. Adriana writhed, eyes wide and mouth gaping open for a breath she couldn’t take. Her body shuddered and tensed, her back arched, and her core clamped around his length.

He quickly relaxed his grip, and she sucked in a deep, desperate breath before crying out from the powerful climax that ravaged her body. Harry slowed but kept plunging in and out of her depths while she twisted and gasped under him. Eventually, she went limp, panting heavily. She’d barely caught her breath before he lifted her up.

They fucked all over the house. Harry took her against the wall, pinned her face-first against the front door, and bent her over an armchair, until they ended up on the living room sofa. Adriana

sat on his lap, back pressed against his chest as she bounced up and down his length. His hands wrapped around her body, mauling her chest and twisting her piercings.

Neither of them heard the front door open and close. The first they became aware that anyone else was in the house was when Thor and Josh walked into the living room. Thor folded his arms over his chest and smirked under his beard while Josh gaped, wide-eyed.

Harry froze, unsure what to do, but Adriana didn't hesitate. She lifted her feet onto the sofa and spread herself wide. Leaning her head back on his shoulder, she kissed his cheek.

"Fuck me," she whispered.

He hesitated again, but she was already back to bouncing on his cock. Shrugging mentally, he held her waist tightly and hammered upwards with short, sharp thrusts. Adriana's pleased cry faded into a low sensual moan. She reached up and twisted her own nipple between her slender fingers.

Harry couldn't say he was surprised she was getting off on having an audience.

Slamming himself furiously and repeatedly into her depths, he rapidly reached his peak. With a groan, he planted her firmly in his lap and erupted. Adriana groaned and clenched around him until he'd finished throbbing inside of her.

After taking a moment to catch her breath, she planted her feet on the floor and stood.

"Thanks, Harry," she grinned. "I needed that. I'm going to go shower now."

She strutted naked past Thor and Josh. Three sets of eyes followed her as she climbed the stairs, breasts bouncing with every step. As they turned back to look at each other, Harry self-consciously grabbed a throw pillow and used it to cover himself.

“Sorry to interrupt, boss, but Josh had a question for you,” Thor said.

He patted Josh hard on the back, jolting him out of his daze.

“R-right... er, I forgot.”

Thor barked a booming laugh, and Harry rolled his eyes.

“Do you mind giving me a minute to get dressed?” he asked pointedly.

“I guess you’re not as much of an exhibitionist as Addy, eh?” Thor asked with a chuckle.

Wrapping his arm around Josh, he led the young man back outside. Quickly gathering his clothes from the kitchen, Harry got dressed and checked his watch. If he was quick, he would still have time to visit Sylvia and Amanda before heading back to the castle.

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The next few weeks passed slowly. Harry spent most of his time teaching the DA, preparing for the ritual, and generally avoiding his class as much as possible.

Using a series of complex Arithmancy calculations, Lily and Narcissa discovered that the best time to perform the ritual was three days before Christmas. That turned out to be quite fortunate timing, since they would be going home for the holidays the following day.

So it was that three days before Christmas, and on the last full day of classes, Harry and Lily snuck out of Gryffindor Tower just after midnight and met Bellatrix and Narcissa in the Room of Requirement.

The setup for the ritual was surprisingly simple. Harry had a very Muggle vision of rituals when he thought about what it would be like. He envisioned a circle of burning candles, Runes drawn with salt, a pentagram drawn in blood, maybe even the need to sacrifice a small, woodland creature, but there was none of that. It involved a chant and a distinct lack of clothes.

“You need as much skin contact as possible,” Lily instructed.

Harry shared a glance with Bella, shrugged, and they both stripped out of their clothes. Despite being in a magical room with a roaring fire, there was still an uncomfortable chill in the air. Bella’s nipples were hard and crinkled, and little Harry was littler than usual.

“Okay, Harry, you sit down on the floor,” Narcissa said. “Bella, you sit down in his lap and wrap your arms and legs over him.”

They got into position, and Bella smirked as she wiggled teasingly in his lap.

“Narcissa and I will start the chant, but we’ll stop before we get to the actual bonding,” Lily told them. “It’ll take a few minutes, and none of us is sure what you’ll experience. Just make sure you don’t move from that position until we’re finished. Got it?”

“Got it,” Harry said, resting his hands on Bella’s bum.

“Wait,” Bella said. “You said we should have as much skin contact as possible, right?”

“Yes,” Lily nodded. “Why?”

Smirking, Bella reached between their bodies and grabbed Harry’s length. He was already mostly hard just from having a pretty, naked witch in his lap, and he hardened the rest of the way when he realized what she had planned. Lifting herself up briefly, she sank down on his length and settled back into a comfortable position.

"We're ready," Bella said.

Shaking her head in amusement, Lily handed a piece of parchment to Narcissa. They each drew their wands and took up position on either side of the sitting pair. In unison, they started chanting in Latin. The sound was almost music.

Harry and Bella smiled at each other as they waited for whatever was going to happen to happen. As the chant continued, it took on a soft, comforting quality. Bella hugged herself tighter against his torso, chin resting on his shoulder.

Harry felt like he was being lulled to sleep, but his eyes didn't feel the need to close. There was no sudden shift, no drastic change, just a gradual understanding. Like waking in a dream. At once, he was nowhere, everywhere, and yet exactly where he was. He saw himself through his own eyes, saw Bella sitting in his lap. He saw Lily read the chant from her parchment even as he read the words over her shoulder.

He became aware of a presence. It was untouchable, but he felt it all the same, and instantly recognizable. Bellatrix. He recognized the feeling as well as he would recognize her face, yet he saw so much more. It wasn't memories, or thoughts, exactly, but something in between. Or perhaps parts of both. It was impossible to put into words, but he knew exactly what it was. Her essence. Her soul.

She wrapped herself around him. He felt her love, her devotion, and her darkness, shriveled and atrophied, but always there.

Harry embraced her, loving, reassuring, anchoring, and extended himself outwards. He felt every soul in the castle. He couldn't touch them the way he touched Bellatrix, but he could feel them all the same. One stood out more than the rest. A dark, pulsating presence that resided in the headmaster's office, locked inside a drawer. It was small, malevolent, powerful. Dangerous.

He could feel the thread that connected it to its source. It vibrated like a guitar string that continued to hum lightly even after the song had ended. And in that moment, he knew, he understood.

The moment the revelation struck, Harry was back in the Room of Requirement. Lily and Narcissa had stopped chanting. Bellatrix let out a heavy, relaxed breath and nuzzled his neck.

“Did it work?” Lily asked.

Harry grinned.

“It worked,” he said. “I know how to destroy the Horcruxes.”

He fell back in sheer relief. Bellatrix followed him, kissing his neck. Staring up at the ceiling, Harry held her tightly and laughed.

For once in his life, he had an answer.