

Summary: An ancient law founded long before the time of Merlin awakens after Harry strikes down Voldemort. Now the oaths of all the Death Eaters transfer to him. Bound to his service, the war criminals must now hand over their fealty, wealth, and even their wives and daughters to satisfy the ancient rite.

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Chapter 18: The Ball Part 2

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“Give me a rundown.”

Hestia nodded as they stepped back into the bustling ballroom. The short witch kept her face neutral, eyes sweeping over the gaggle of lords, ladies, and celebrities alike.

“He arrived 10 minutes ago. Flora clocked him first and signalled me immediately. So far, he’s played nicely, only speaking to a few members of other previously dark families. It’s not his behaviour that caught our attention,” she explained, throwing a discreet gesture towards the bar tucked away on the far side of the room.

Harry followed with his eyes, almost immediately locking in on the rat-faced visage of Theodore Nott. The shorter boy was speaking to two vaguely familiar individuals whom Harry recognised as the third Rosier son and a Bulstrode cousin or another. Yet it was the man who stood beside Nott that truly caught Harry’s attention.

He was tall, with shoulder-length blonde hair and a goatee that curled down into a singular braid. Even with the distance between them, Harry could make out the jagged scars criss-crossing the man’s face, with one even twisting up from the corner of his mouth and tracing its way over his left eye. It was then that Harry realised that the

mystery man was staring back at him, one milky white eye and the other ice blue peering back unblinkingly as the man's mouth twisted into a wicked grin.

Unperturbed, Harry kept his gaze level with the stranger's. He vaguely recognised the man, but for the life of him, Harry couldn't place where. At any rate, he was very much not a *Nott* relative. Unless he married into the family?

He already hated having to consider these types of things—sorting through the complicated webs of who married whom, where favours were owed, what loyalties had been purchased, and the like; all that apparently passed as “culture” to Purebloods. Only when the scarred wizard finally turned away to answer a question asked by the Rosier scion did Harry glance back to Hestia.

“Nott's ‘friend’, I presume?”

Hestia nodded. “His name is Diedrich karr Voss. Former german national duelling champion and two-time world champion as well,” at that realisation finally dawned on Harry. He remembered hearing about some famous deulist from the continent, one who had a reputation for being particularly ruthless with his competition, so much so that he'd been forced to retire from the international circuit for killing two other combatants. Now that he's seen the man himself, even Harry wasn't ashamed to admit that he certainly *looked* the part of a strong duelist.

No matter. He's faced plenty of bloodthirsty madmen. Voss was nothing new.

“Why is a world-renowned deuling champion here on the invitation of Nott of all people?” Daphne voiced.

“I don't know, but I doubt the answer is one we'll like.”

Harry hummed and shot the scarred wizard one last glance, unsurprised when he found the man's eyes upon him once more. Beside him, Nott did his best to keep the conversation with the other two nobles flowing, but Harry didn't miss the small slip of the rat-faced wizard's eyes glancing up towards him before just as quickly darting back to his companions.

Curious.

"We can't assume anything just yet," Harry spoke, turning to flag down a server carrying a tray of drinks. "Keep an eye on them, Nott specifically. Something tells me Voss isn't the one calling the shots tonight."

Hestia nodded while Daphne pursed her lips as she normally did when she didn't agree with something. The shorter witch quickly scampered off, no doubt to fill her sister in on the recent developments, while Harry took two drinks from the server, a glass of whiskey and a flute of champagne, before turning back to Daphne.

"C'mon, you're the one who says I need to socialise at these things, right?" he said with a grin, offering his arm to the blonde. Daphne rolled her eyes but took it regardless, looping her arm through his as they began to walk through the throngs of guests.

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It was some time later, after a few politically charged conversations with differing members of the Wizengamot and another overly flirtatious back and forth with Madame Moretti, that he and Daphne found themselves alone once more.

"You don't agree with my decision to leave Nott and Voss alone for now?" he asked, discreetly casting an anti-eavesdropping charm with a subtle flick of his fingers.

Daphne relaxed somewhat as the charm's magic rolled over them.

“It seems like an unnecessary risk is all,” she replied, absentmindedly running a finger around the edge of her champagne flute.

Harry sighed and discreetly glanced towards where Nott and his ‘guest’ stood quietly conversing between themselves. They had hardly moved from the bar, only venturing out twice to converse with other guests. Each time, Nott was the one to take charge, leading the German wizard along as he struck up another conversation. Odd considering that Nott looked nearly ready to jump out of his skin, nervously licking his lips every now and again while keeping his gaze low outside of conversations, while Voss, on the other hand, weaved confidently through the crowd with his head held high yet not once speaking more than a few words when prompted.

“Maybe,” he finally spoke. “But you’re the one who’s always saying to not react rashly. I may be abysmal at this political shite, but I do know how dark wizards think. If Nott did bring Voss here for some ulterior motive, then confronting them directly could put us in a position where we’re playing right into their hands, but if we wait? Well—” Harry took a drink of whiskey, letting the burning liquor slide down his throat before continuing.

“Someone like Voss can only remain patient for so long. He’ll slip up, giving us everything we need to put a stop to his and Nott’s scheme.”

“So you believe it’s best to allow them the first move?” Daphne all but hissed.

“Regardless of Voss, Nott is a viper, Harry. Cowardly, yes, but dangerous enough to pose a significant threat should you not be cautious.”

Harry sighed and glanced towards the duo. Truthfully, the very sight of Nott repulsed him, and Voss was an unknown that made every instinct within him scream ‘*Danger!*’.

Not for the first time that night, he had to force himself not to reach for his wand and confront them then and there. But that wouldn't give him the answers he needed.

"If we act now, we risk losing any chance of learning what their game is," he whispered.

"Daph' I need you to trust me on this. Politics and public opinion are one thing, but dealing with dark wizards is where I excel. Know that when I say I have things handled, I mean it."

He watched as Daphne worried her bottom lip, her eyes roaming across the crowd before dropping down with a sigh. "I—Perhaps you're right. I am being a tad unreasonable. It's just that Nott—he's *foul*. His very presence makes my skin crawl, especially after that little worm tried to use Astoria's life as leverage," she sighed, silently acquiescing to his point. "I still don't like it."

"Neither do I," he murmured.

Before their conversation could continue, Harry caught the approach of a familiar figure in the corner of his eyes. He smiled as they approached, quickly dispelling the ward.

"There you are, you prat!" Susan Bones bellowed. The auburn-haired beauty didn't waste a second in throwing out all pretences of propriety and instead wrapped Harry up in a bone-crushing hug. "It's been ages!"

Harry laughed and gave the redhead a quick hug back. "It's good to see you too, Sue."

Susna released him with a grin, barely waiting a second before slugging him hard in the arm. "That's for not writing!" Harry winced and clutched the sore spot blooming on his shoulder.

"Ouch! Easy Sue! I've been a little busy lately!"

Susan scoffed, flicking her auburn coloured bangs from her eyes and cocking her hip to the side. “That’s a shite excuse and you know it, Potter! Just cause you’re too distracted shagging all your bloody concubines or whatever—” Susan shot an apologetic smile towards Daphne. “No offence Greengrass—Doesn’t mean you don’t have the time to grab a pint with your mates from time to time!” Daphne rolled her eyes and turned towards Harry with a light pat against his arm.

“Susan is right, *my lord*,” she cooed teasingly. “You’ve been a dreadful friend lately. Allow me to give you two time to catch up while I see how many more drunken nobles I can sweet-talk into donating their fortunes away, hmm?”

“Atta girl!” Susan cheered as Daphne placed a quick peck against his cheek and sauntered away. The redhead watched his lover walk off, unabashedly staring straight at Daphne’s arse the entire way. “Fuck hell mate! What I wouldn’t do to have Greengrass in *my bed* every night! You’re one lucky bloke, Potter!”

Harry laughed and quickly flagged down a drink server for Susan. The redhead took the offered martini gratefully, turning back to Harry with a sigh.

“Sorry, probably bad form to talk about how much I wanna fuck your girlfriend or whatever, yeah?” Susan took a sip of her martini and hummed appreciatively.

Harry waved the girl's words off. “You’re fine Sue’. Guessing that means you and Ernie didnt work out, though, huh?”

Susan grimaced. “Putting things a bit mildly,” she groaned before continuing on. “Ern wasn’t a bad guy—he just wasn’t what I was looking for, I suppose. He wanted to settle down, have a family and all that, and I get it, y’know? I’m the last Bones, and with that comes a precedent to have tykes of my own eventually. S’just that I wanna *live* a little

first—let loose, have fun—build a career! I wanna get piss drunk with my friends on the weekends and kick criminal arse on the weekdays! I wanna swan off to Peru just cause I feel like it and spend a week prancing around my flat in my knickers!” The redhead deflated slightly, a grimace overtaking her features before she threw the rest of her drink back in one go. Susan shook her head from the sudden rush of alcohol, clearing her throat lightly before she said, “Ernie just couldn’t give me that.”

Harry nodded. He could understand that. After the war was over, while the rebuilding began and the wizarding world moved forward, Harry had still been reeling from the sudden loss of so many of his friends and allies. The fact that a vast majority of magical Britain had looked to him to lead them forward hadn’t helped matters much. So he took off. Travelled with Hermione to Australia to collect her parents, and afterwards continued on, exploring parts of the world where Harry Potter was nothing special—where he had the freedom to be just Harry. The only reason he had even returned after only two months was because Kingsley had asked. The Minister had told him of the then-upcoming Death Eater trials and explained that with Harry there, it would go a long way in showing the public there would be no leniency given to these monsters. Harry had agreed with Kingsley’s rationale then, still did in fact, and then of course the trial happened...and Harry found himself with a whole new weight of responsibility upon his shoulders.

Placing a hand on Susan’s shoulder, he gave her a comforting squeeze and said, “You don’t have to be upset for wanting to live your life how you choose, Susan. You’ll find someone who understands that one day, and you’ll have made them the luckiest person in the world when you do.”

Susan smiled—appreciation shining in her grey orbs. After a moment, the redhead cleared her throat, giving his arm a light slap.

“Look at you going all soft on me. Where’s the badarse Gryffindor who outflew a dragon, eh?”

Harry barked out a laugh. Susan joined in as well, their sounds of mirth soon dissolving into a much lighter and friendlier conversation. Eventually, the auburn-haired auror said her farewell, but not before she wrung a promise out of him to meet up at Bones Manor for drinks the week after.

“And bring Greengrass!” she had said. “Hell, Parkinson too if you’d like! Those ladies need some girl time with someone who *isn’t* bound to you by magic. It’ll do wonders for that big head of yours!”

Harry waved her off with a chuckle, suddenly feeling a lot better about the evening after conversing with his friend. When he turned back to the party at large, however, his good mood soon dissipated.

As he’d been speaking with Susan, Harry had remained vigilant, watching Nott and Voss. Luckily, he was good enough not to make it obvious, lest Susan, Nott, or anyone else in attendance notice. So far, the two had largely kept to their pattern. Nott spoke with only a handful of other guests here and there, and even then, not for very long. Voss remained by his side, speaking only a few select words but otherwise keeping silent throughout the night. They never strayed far from their little corner—never made a single move to otherwise confront Harry or his allies...

Until now.

“Lord Potter, a pleasure.” Voss’s lips twisted into an ugly smile. His teeth were plated in a gleaming silver coating. A false set, perhaps? Or an enchantment? Harry didn’t bother asking. Instead he flicked his eyes down to the man’s offered hand, suspicion crawling up his spine.

“Herr Voss,” Harry replied, taking the man’s hand slowly and giving it a stiff shake. “How do you do?”

“Wonderful, *danke!* You have thrown a good party, yes? At least for you Englishmen.”

He laughed, the sound sharp and roughened, like a chipped blade being passed over a whetstone.

“Are the parties better where you’re from Herr Voss?” he questioned with a strained smile. Harry took a moment to quickly scan the party at large, searching for where Nott could have run off to without his companion.

“Diedrich, please,” Voss smirked. “And better is not the term I would use. Livelier, yes. In Germany, we do not worry about silly pleasantries and polite conversation. We are, how you say, more direct. At our parties, people drink, they fight, they fuck. Propriety. Appropriacy. These are words for men who fear being their true selves. A sentiment I hear you do not share, yes?”

Harry shrugged. “I suppose. Civility is useful where it can be used, but honeyed words aren’t what kept me alive through the war. And they sure as hell won’t be what stops the next wannabe dark lord.”

Voss’s smirk widened. The blonde man barked out another laugh, his one good eye shining with something Harry couldn’t place.

“*Sehr gut!* It is rare I find a wizard who speaks these words with such conviction! I only wonder if you can...scheisse, how do you English say it? Put your galleons where your mouth is, yes?”

Harry narrowed his eyes. “Are you challenging me to a duel, Diedrich?” Out of the corner of his eye, he not only saw Hestia spot him and Voss with a quiet look of concern, but Nott as well. The rat-faced boy was seemingly coming back from the loo when he spotted Voss and Harry, his face going white instantly with a look of panic. The man grinned wolfishly. “And if I am?”

“Then you should understand my hesitancy, given your less-than-stellar reputation. A casual duel is all well and good, but be warned, Diedrich, if you were to draw your wand against me with the same level of malice you showed your other opponents...well then I can’t guarantee you’ll walk away from that fight.” Harry spoke slowly, his voice hard like stone to reflect the seriousness of his words. Voss was a threat, but Harry was a greater one.

Instead of waving off his words with a scoff or angrily retorting at the blatant threat, Voss merely laughed once more, his eyes shining even brighter with borderline manic glee.

“*Endlich ein Gegner, der meine Zeit wert ist!* Man-Who-Won indeed!” Voss cackled.

“Fret not, my friend, that man you know me for is in the past! Diedrich karr Voss once *lived* for the competition—to feel the blood roaring in his veins and the air crackling as spell after spell passed by—but no more! Our duel will be out of friendship, *da?* Call it humouring an old fighter past his prime. It would be a great honour for me, I assure you!”

Harry very much doubted Voss's words. The scarred wizard may be older, but there was no doubt in Harry's mind that he was still just as sharp and lethal as his reputation foretold. It was something about the way he held himself, eyes wide and smile twisted like an excited child...it was like every cell in Voss's body was teetering on the edge, waiting for the chance to lash out the second Harry agreed. He wanted this more than a simple 'friendly duel' warranted. He was like a starved beast that caught the scent of blood. To what end, though? For Nott? Did the cowardly Slytherin put him up to this, in the hopes he'---what?---defeat Harry? Kill him? It certainly seemed shortsighted, even for the rat-faced fool, and at a great risk to Voss himself. Harry could very well kill the man, famed duellist or no, even Voss would have considered this despite his prowess with a wand. So that either meant Nott was paying the man very well—which couldn't be true since most of the Nott family wealth was now being spent funding the next several generations of Muggle-born students' Hogwarts tuition—or there was something else at play here. Something Harry wasn't seeing.

Before he could ponder such possibilities further, the very object of his suspicions suddenly appeared.

"Ah, Theodore!" Voss exclaimed, wrapping an arm around the smaller boy's shoulder. "I was just inviting Lord Potter here to a friendly duel between us! You two are acquaintances, yes? You must tell Lord Potter it will be the grandest of times!"

"I—Lord Potter apologies for my... associate's behaviour," Nott said, stepping out of Voss's grasp to quickly bow his head. "It was very presumptuous of him to make such a demand of you."

“Bah! Demand? Don’t be so fucking dramatic, Theodore! I would never dare to demand anything of Lord Potter!” Voss chortled with a jovial smile, yet Harry didn’t miss the brief flash of anger that threatened to pull the man’s lips down into a scowl. “It would be an honour for any duellist to cross wands with the great hero of our world! You cannot fault me for jumping at such an opportunity, *da?*”

He watched as Nott grimaced, the boy’s lips pursing like he’d just been sucking on a lemon. Harry made a note of that. Nott obviously disliked the idea of him and Voss crossing wands in any capacity, which meant that—whatever their plan was—it very much did not include Voss because of his skill with a wand. In fact, something told Harry that accepting Voss’s offer would only derail Nott’s plans further.

He could live with that.

“No, nor should he,” Harry spoke up before Nott could so much as open his mouth. “And you’re right Deidrich, it does sound like a truly grand time. I will accept your challenge, but not tonight. Propriety and all that shite, yeah?”

Voss all but shouted out with glee, his resounding laugh of joy drawing more than a few curious eyes. “I knew I would not be disappointed by you, Lord Potter!”

“Harry, please. It’s only fair for us to be on a first-name basis, considering I’ll be the one to finally kick your arse.”

Voss’s wolfish grin returned. “Harry, then. I will await your owl on the time and place, eagerly, my friend!” Voss wrapped his arm around Nott’s neck once more, the younger boy looking far more pale than was strictly healthy. “Come, Theodore! We have taken much of our friend Harry’s time, and I wish to celebrate! You are buying, of course...”

Harry watched Voss drag the English wizard away, the smile dropping from his face as soon as the pair disappeared into the crowd.

Daphne appeared beside him not a moment later, clutching his arm like a lifeline despite the outward calm expression on her face. "What did Voss want?!" She quietly hissed.

Harry downed the remainder of his whiskey, the burning liquid far less soothing than it ought to be.

"A duel," he answered.

Daphne breathed a sigh of relief. "Oh! Good, you told him no, of course?"

"..."

"Harry?"

"....."

"You *did* tell him no...right?"

"About that..."

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As soon as they were beyond the threshold of Greengrass Manor, Theodore wrenched himself free of Voss's grasp.

"What the fuck was that?!" he seethed, turning to glare venomously at the older wizard.

Voss, for his part, ignored the boy's whines in favour of stuffing a cigarette between his lips and taking a long inhale.

"Well?!" Nott snarled after he refused to answer.

Voss sighed. What he wouldn't give to be able to just kill the fucking annoyance already...

“That—” he said, breathing out a cloud of smoke directly into the boy's face. “--was one step closer to our shared goal.”

Theodore grimaced, hastily waving the smoke from his eyes. “You were meant to only observe! Nothing more! I told you a stunt like that would only raise Potter’s suspicions! You think he didn’t see through your fucking ‘friendly duel’ bullshit?!”

Voss sighed again. He’s had enough. Quick as a flash, the scarred wizard had his wand drawn and the point pressed painfully deep into the squabbling boy's throat. Instantly, Theodore’s protests died. His body went rigid, fear evident in his beady, ugly eyes. Good—Voss smiled widely and wickedly. It would be oh so simple. A small flick of his wrist, and the rat’s lifeblood would be pooling at his feet, and his ears would be free of the screeching torment...

...But no. His master had been clear. Theodore had his uses and was to be unharmed...for now.

“Listen closely, little boy,” Voss whispered, leaning down until his breath washed over the boy’s terrified face. “I do what you ask because my master asks it of *me*. But neither he nor I tolerate cowardice. You wish for my master’s aide, yes? The only way to get it is if I agree that Harry Potter is as much of a threat as you say—And I will only make my decision after my wand has crossed with his. This is, how you english say, ‘non-negotiable’.”

He released his grip without warning, watching in satisfaction as the petulant fool fell to the ground with a cry. He began to walk away, leaving the Nott heir behind in the dirt, but not before throwing one last remark back.

“Oh, and boy? Disrespect me again, and not even my Lord Grindlewald’s orders will stay my wand from gutting you like a pig...”

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Author’s Note

No smut this chapter, but that’s because of PLOT! Don’t worry though, I’ll make up for it next chapter ;)

Thanks for reading!