

Harry felt like he owed Voldemort. The Dark Lord had been a good sport so far and had unintentionally become his training partner in the Mind Arts and other disciplines of magic. The amusing thing was that Voldemort did not even realise he was only strengthening his skills in magic. Over the last few weeks, Voldemort had been desperately trying to infiltrate his mind.

At first, it was just a mere nuisance for Harry. He had even taken it upon himself to combat the Dark Lord in the Mind Arts as a healthy way of practising his Occlumency skills. But Voldemort remained persistent in trying to breach the safeguards Harry placed in his mind. As days went by and Voldemort's attempts never seemed to be stopping. Harry thought about the possibility of attacking back in the same vein. Harry assumed Voldemort's razor-sharp focus or obsession with gaining control of his mind would open up the Dark Lord's mind for him.

And Harry was finding out he was not far off from that assumption.

As of late, he had managed to slip unnoticed into Voldemort's mind whenever the Dark Lord was desperately cramming down visions about the prophecy orb and Department of Mysteries into his mind. The few times he successfully employed Legilimency against Voldemort, he gleaned some helpful information like the current bases of Death Eaters. He also gleaned some useful obscure spells from Voldemort's mind created by the Dark Lord. He had a feeling they'd come in handy, and he could make some countermeasures now that he knew the spell repository inside Voldemort's mind.

But the most crucial information he gathered was some of the plans Voldemort was working on. He was amused to find out Voldemort had sent some of his Death Eaters into the Muggle world to track down his relatives to use as hostages. But there were other targets far closer to home, and Harry could not allow that to stand. He had already sent out warnings to Sirius and the Tonks family to look out for certain shady characters. They all mutually decided to leave the matter to Nymphadora, who assured them the Death Eaters would get a straight trip to Azkaban.

Harry was not exactly keyed in on the details, but he was told not to worry too much. He was confident to leave such matters to Nym because she had covered for him during the summer holidays while Dumbledore was snooping around with his big nose. Besides, she was a big girl being an auror and all.

While he left the security of the adults his life to the adults, Harry focused on a more subtle method of waging a shadow war on Voldemort and keeping up his activities in Hogwarts. Between the Quidditch practices, his academic commitments, Horcrux research and training in combat magic, he was nearly stretched thin. At times like these, he felt immensely thankful for the Hogsmeade visits.

"What're you thinking?" Daphne asked, elbowing him on his ribs.

"Ow! You're getting abusive these days." Harry complained, rubbing his side while balefully staring at Daphne.

Daphne, however, remained unimpressed with his attempts at faux intimidation.

"I know that look. You're planning something in that crooked mind of yours." Daphne accused, her blue eyes gaining a sharp glint while Harry raised an eyebrow. "Out with it."

"I was thinking of ways to get you out of those robes." Harry whispered.

"Oh, really?" Daphne rolled her eyes. "Tell me, what great plans have you come up with this time?"

"You'll see." Harry winked, throwing his arm around Daphne's shoulder as they walked through the busy streets of Hogsmeade on a date.

As usual, their first stop was Honeydukes. Daphne being a chocolate maniac, could not breathe without replenishing her stock of chocolates. Seeing the obsession of Daphne and most witches and wizards for chocolates, Harry was thinking of starting a chocolate-based business. He was not exactly looking to produce new chocolate bars, but something modelled after Starbucks. It'd be a challenge to make the Brits drink anything but tea, but as an ardent coffee enthusiast, he hoped he could 'save' the wizarding world from the 'demonic' grip of the 'evil' tea. Maybe he could somehow spin hot chocolate and coffee as proper 'wizarding beverages'. While he was not confident in the success of coffee, he was pretty much assured of hot chocolate gaining popularity if there were more chocolate-addicted witches like Daphne around.

After raiding Honeydukes for all kinds of flavours across its many shelves, they were out of the shop. Harry stared at the hairdressing salon across the street from Honeydukes thoughtfully.

"If you want a haircut, I can wait." Daphne offered.

"No. I think I'll grow out my hair. Who knows? Maybe my chances with you might improve." Harry said, wagging his eyebrows suggestively.

"Don't pin all your hopes on your hair Potter." Daphne smirked, walking away from the shop with Harry.

"Oh, I won't. My dashing looks and brilliant mind are enough." Harry boasted.

Daphne rolled her eyes, but the slight grin adorning her lips showed she was amused by his flirting.

"We'll see." said Daphne hummed, bobbing her head.

"I wonder who Neville is bringing to our double date. He has been very secretive," said Harry as they closed in on Madam Puddifoot's tea shop. "Could it be Hermione?"

"I don't think so. Hermione is with Tracey. They're working on their runes project." said Daphne.

"Then who could it be?" Harry wondered.

"We'll find out soon enough." said Daphne.

When they reached the tea shop, Harry could see it was already filled with more customers.

"After you, my lady." Harry said, holding out the door for Daphne.

"Why, thank you, sir." Daphne gracefully walked inside the tea shop.

"Oh, no." Harry muttered once his eyes fell on Neville and his 'date'.

"Wow! That's rather surprising." Daphne muttered after a moment of stunned silence.

Harry couldn't agree more with Daphne's comment as he stared at Neville sitting with Susan Bones. Before he could say anything, Neville noticed him and beckoned him towards the table.

"I don't think this is such a good idea. What if she's here to do her aunt's bidding?" Harry muttered to Daphne.

"What if she isn't?" Daphne asked back, leaving Harry wordless. "Let's sit down with them and see where it goes."

Harry was more than suspicious about Susan's sudden presence right when the Knights started admitting members from other houses. He had shot down the idea of bringing Susan Bones into the Knights because of her aunt. He didn't want to give any ammunition to Amelia Bones despite the safety of magical contracts enforcing binding secrecy with penalties on the signatories.

However, Harry gave heed to Daphne's advice and, against his better judgment, joined Neville and Susan at the table with Daphne by his side.

"Hey, Harry." Susan greeted him.

Harry merely nodded at the Bones heiress to acknowledge her presence. He could endure sitting with the niece of his political enemy, but that doesn't mean he had to be friendly until he knew for sure Susan Bones had no ulterior motive.

"This is surely a surprise, Neville. You kept this a secret from us for long enough. So, spill the details." said Daphne, her eyes shining with excitement.

'And I thought she was different. Girls, they are all the same.' Harry thought with a scoff.

Throughout Neville's tale of running into Susan during the Yule holidays at a private greenhouse in Yorkshire, Harry kept his senses on full alert, focused on Susan for any incongruity. Unfortunately, his magical senses could feel no taint of deceit coming from the younger witch. Using magical sense to discern deception was not exactly a time-tested method, but he tried anyway. Harry remained a passive observer as Neville and Susan engaged with Daphne. He occasionally stepped in to make a comment, but other than that, he preferred to keep mum.

Thankfully, the date finally ended, and they split off from the tea shop.

"You were rude. You could've been a little more friendly towards Susan." Daphne commented as they walked hand in hand along the streets of Hogsmeade.

"She's the niece of the woman who heads the DMLE. I had to fight tooth and nail to clear Sirius' name while her aunt was trying to put my Godfather in Azkaban for a crime he didn't even have a trial for. I think I'm owed a little latitude here, don't you think?"

"I suppose you attempted to talk to her." Daphne mused aloud.

"Thank you." Harry harrumphed.

"I mean. there were many moody grunts, and the largest word you ever said in the conversation was 'great'. But yeah, you talked." Daphne deadpanned.

"Are you my girlfriend or Susan Bones'?" Harry asked, not impressed with Daphne.

"I'm debating the merits of that in mind right now." Daphne shot back.

"Don't make any hasty decisions. We still have a place to visit, and after that, you can take the decision." said Harry.

"All right, Potter. Impress me." Daphne challenged him, and Harry was all for it.

A few minutes later, Daphne looked scared out of her mind at the place they were visiting.

"The whomping willow!" Daphne said incredulously. "That's your ideal place for our date?"

Harry laughed off the look Daphne was giving him.

"There is no need to worry. The whomping willow won't attack us. I've seen to that." said Harry, dragging a reluctant Daphne with him.

But Daphne became less worried as the whomping willow did not make any moves to smash them despite getting closer to its base.

"How did you...?" Daphne asked, still looking at the giant branches of the violent tree warily.

"Everyone underestimates my resourcefulness, my love. Well,...except for the Sorting Hat, who thought I'd fit right in with the house of snakes."

"Wait!" Daphne came to a halt forcing Harry to stop as well. "The Sorting Hat wanted to place you in Slytherin?"

"As a matter of fact, yes. But I talked that dusty old hat out of that particular decision," said Harry, leading Daphne slowly towards the tree's base.

"Why? You would've done great in Slytherin. For Merlin's sake, you're even a Parselmouth! You have Slytherin's gift and his blood."

"Look at me, Daphne. Do you think I'm anything else but great?" Harry asked with a smirk.

"You arrogant prick." Daphne hit him on his arm while Harry chuckled.

"Anyway, we are here. Tada!" Harry waved his wand, and the secret entrance at the tree's base became visible before Daphne's eyes, making her gasp.

Harry had Dobby clear out the entrance and install an ornate door with magical graffiti of a lion, stag, grim and werewolf on the door.

“Welcome to the secret lair of the Marauders.” Harry whispered into a surprised Daphne’s ear.

“You mean this is where your father and Sirius went with Professor Lupin when he transformed?” Daphne asked, looking parts thrilled and surprised.

“Not exactly. This is merely a secret entrance. Our true destination awaits us, my lady.” Harry said with a smirk, offering his hand to a stunned Daphne.

Eyes alight with wonder and joy, Daphne placed her hand in his, and together they traversed through the secret passage beneath the whomping willow. The previously narrow dark corridor filled with roots and soot was now expanded and layered with polished enchanted wood that kept the passage dust free. The whomping willow would also find it hard to penetrate the area with its giant roots, thanks to the enchantments on the wooden floorboards.

“You cleaned this all up for me?” Daphne asked, staring in wonder at the brightly lit corridor.

‘Yeah, let’s call it that and not preserving the legacy of Marauders.’ Harry thought.

“All for you, Daphs.” Harry grinned at her while patting himself on the back for smoothly turning everything to his advantage.

They finally came to the end of the corridor in no time.

“Welcome, to the infamous lair of the Marauders. I give you the Shrieking Shack.” Harry said with a flourish while opening the door for Daphne.

Daphne stepped inside, followed closely by Harry. There were many paintings inside the room, all of them with rare magical creatures in their habitat. There was a wide expanse of a couch and several large cushioned chairs inside the shack. There was even a fireplace inside, and she saw two empty glasses with a bottle of wine on the table.

“So, what do you think?” Harry inquired as he uncorked the wine bottle and poured half a glass into both glasses on the table.

“This is wonderful, Harry.” Daphne said, looking genuinely impressed by the length of detail and preparation Harry took for her.

“Hold your horses, woman. You haven’t seen the main attraction.” said Harry, passing one glass to Daphne while he kept the other.

“There is more?” Daphne asked, her mouth parting in disbelief while a smile threatened to overcome her face.

“You’ll have to finish the wine if you want to see more. And don’t worry. It’s sweet wine.” said Harry, taking a sip and enjoying the delicate taste as it trickled down his throat.

“What else have you planned?” Daphne wondered aloud, making Harry wink at her while he drained the last drops of wine in his glass.

“Finish your wine and find out.” said Harry, setting the empty wine glass down on the table.

Daphne took her sweet time to finish her wine, all the while searching for any hidden surprises. When she couldn't find any despite her strenuous efforts, Daphne drained the last drops of wine in her glass and set the empty glass on the table.

“Okay. Show me.” Daphne said, finally admitting defeat as she could not find anything.

Harry smirked before rapidly shifting his form. In the blink of an eye, an enormous lion was standing before Daphne. When Harry let out a growl, Daphne screamed and fell back into the couch in fright.

Harry couldn't help it as he started laughing in his animagus form. The sounds that came from his lion-mouth were indeed strange, but he couldn't contain his laughter seeing the look on Daphne's face.

“You... wha...How?” Daphne spluttered as she came face to face with a giant lion whose eyes were a familiar shade of bright emeralds.

It took her a moment to realise Harry had changed into a lion without his wand.

“This is not a self-transfiguration.” Daphne said tentatively, and the lion nodded, making her take a mouthful of air to fill her lungs.

“You're an animagus!” Daphne exclaimed, looking mighty impressed.

Harry moved forward, startling Daphne, but he merely nuzzled against her with his head. It took Daphne a moment to overcome the surreal experience of a giant lion nuzzling against her hand. Once she recovered, she took off her robes and adjusted herself on the couch so that Harry could lie his head on her lap.

“Well, aren't you cute li'l cat?” Daphne cooed, scratching Harry's chin while her hands threaded through his golden mane.

Harry let out a growl in offence, making Daphne jump in her seat.

“Oh, all right. You are a mean mighty lion.” Daphne rolled her eyes.

Harry leaned in more so that he was nudging her abdomen and climbing.

“Bad lion.” Daphne slapped his nose and pinched his ear, making him whine.

“Master Harry. Miss Daphie.”

Harry and Daphne looked to the owner of the sound, who turned out to be Dobby, with a camera in hand.

“Smile.” said Dobby.

Daphne laughed, threw her arms around Harry in his animagus form, and made different poses while Dobby took many photos of them together.

In the end, Harry only got a pyrrhic victory of sorts.

As he promised, Harry made Daphne drop her robes. Unfortunately, Daphne was not willing to drop the dress she was wearing underneath the robes despite his best efforts.

The classes continued in earnest while OWL and NEWT students focused more and more on their exams. Despite the exams on the horizon, the attractive activities in Hogwarts did not suffer a bit. The Weasley twins continued to terrorise Hogwarts with their new prank products. Peeves wasted no opportunity to surprise students in the hallways. Even Harry was a victim of a water balloon by Peeves that turned his hair neon green for a whole day.

Voldemort's desperation and obsession with the prophecy also worked wonders for Harry. The Dark Lord's arrogance, magical weakness and thanks to the botched-up ritual made it possible for Harry to weaponise their connection in ways he had never dreamed. This left Harry quite pleased, but every day he was carefully building up a niche trap for the Dark Lord. He was waiting for Voldemort to become desperate enough to make an even greater mistake for the final blow.

Even Quidditch practice was going quite well despite Angelina's worries. To take the pressure from the Gryffindor captain's shoulders, the Slytherin-Ravenclaw match ended in favour of Ravenclaw, but their points were not enough to be a threat. Cho Chang had captured the snitch early on, defeating Slytherin with an 80-point margin. But Ravenclaw remained in the third spot, although they were shy of twenty points from a tie with Hufflepuff for the second spot. As they had predicted, the match for the Quidditch Cup would be a Hufflepuff-Gryffindor match.

When the last week of April came, fifth years students were required to attend a meeting with their respective heads of house for career guidance. It was supposed to be a session to help the students prepare for their professional careers and get valuable advice or guidance to select their courses in the sixth year. But Harry was already pretty much confident about what he wanted to do.

"Professor." Harry nodded, sitting across from McGonagall, who looked a tad hesitant and rattled.

Harry could understand why his head of house was behaving that way. They had not talked much after their explosive conversation regarding Colin Creevey.

"Potter. I assume you understand why we are having this discussion."

“Yes, Professor. You want to give me ‘advice’ on my career prospects.” Harry almost regretted the inflammatory tone he used on the word ‘advice’, but it came out involuntarily.

Thankfully, McGonagall ignored his tone if she picked up on it, and Harry was grateful for that.

“So, what sort of career do you want to pursue, Mr Potter?” asked McGonagall, taking a quill into her hand, ready to scribble something down on parchment.

“My temperament leaves me dispositioned to challenge any authority exerted over me. So, I need a profession where I can grow and be a decision-maker. Therefore, I believe I’ll be pursuing my own business. Should the climate and time be conducive enough, I believe I’ll also be pursuing the post of Minister of Magic.” Harry said confidently, leaving McGonagall to stare at him with a dropped mouth.

McGonagall cleared her throat and regained her composure.

“That’s an ambitious goal.”

“I know.” Harry shrugged.

“There are other options before you. Your father chose to join the aurors. You could also pursue a career in Quidditch. You are more than skilled enough to play the league games, and perhaps you could end up playing for the national team.” McGonagall suggested.

“My father might have preferred to sit far away from the table and unquestioningly take orders. I don’t. As for quidditch, it’s a sport that I enjoy in school. I don’t prefer doing it my whole life. Being a circus monkey for the masses is a waste of time when my skills and energies are better spent elsewhere.” Harry waved his hand dismissively.

“So...business. What sort of business are you looking to start, Mr Potter?” McGonagall asked after a moment of silence.

“Well, I’ve already invested a small amount of gold in a new business, as you might know. I’ve yet to earn back my initial investment, but I believe I’m heading for a good profit margin in the coming years. Other than that, I’m also interested in pursuing chocolate and silk. Honeydukes is the only major provider of chocolates, and I think I can provide some competition in the market.”

“I see. You might be interested to know that Potters made their fortune through potions.” McGonagall said, looking up from her notes.

“I know. Sirius told me.” Harry acknowledged the professor with a nod.

“Well, based on the two fields of business you mentioned, I recommend that you take Charms, Potions, Care of Magical Creatures, Arithmancy, DADA and Herbology for your sixth year. Pursuing these subjects to the NEWT level would certainly aid you. However, you must know Professor Snape only allows those with an Outstanding in the OWLs into sixth-year Potions class. Your performance in other subjects is quite consistent.”

“I see. Thank you for informing me, professor.” said Harry.

“Then there is the matter of your entry into politics. No amount of schoolwork would be strictly necessary for the field. But, I’d advise you to give more focus on the History of Magic. No one would ask for grades you scored in school, but it’ll be good to have a lawmaker who knows our past so that they may make better judgements in the present and the future.”

Harry mulled over the advice provided by Professor McGonagall in his head and found it held some substance.

“I’ll keep that in mind, professor.”

“Good. I’d recommend that you continue your current subjects into the next year. Professors Babbling, Flitwick, and Vector have only high praises for you. Ancient runes would hardly be something you’d encounter if you pursued the businesses mentioned. Still, your talent in the subject might give you an opportunity to pursue a business in enchanting or warding in the future. Should you find the subjects too bothersome, you could drop them in your seventh year when you appear for the NEWT exams.”

Harry nodded, and the meeting ended with that last piece of advice.

The very next day, Harry was dressed up in Quidditch robes for the final game of the season. It was the match that’d decide the Quidditch Cup and perhaps settle the House Cup as well. The more points they could shell out, the better the point level would be for Gryffindor.

“All right, everyone. Gather around.” Angelina called, looking confident as she stood on the ground like a lone wolf warrior.

Harry exchanged a smile with Katie.

“Yeah, I’m thinking the same thing, Potter. Now move before she bites our heads off.” Katie pushed him forward.

Harry chuckled but walked towards their captain. The stands erupted in cheers as the Gryffindor team assembled as Angelina requested.

“Look at that! Angelina Johnson is gathering her team for one last bit of talk. Wonder what she is saying to the team. She has had a good season so far. Oliver Wood in female form, some call her.” Lee Jordan enthusiastically shouted for everyone to hear.

“Jordan!” McGonagall warned.

“It’s just locker room talk, professor. Oh, look! The Hufflepuff team is here.” Jordan pointed his hands excitedly.

“I’ll be having some choice words with that guy after the game.” said Angelina, eyeing the commentary box with a fiery look. “Now, I don’t have anything to tell you other than you guys are the best team I could ever ask for. I’m sorry if I was hard on you this year.”

“Oh, Angie. You were not so bad.” Alicia rubbed her friend’s back in support.

“Yeah, Angie. You were like a fairy...”

“A scary fairy with sharp claws and teeth...”

Fred and George snickered as they made their pitch.

“You’ve had your moments, Cap’n. But we wouldn’t have it any other way.” Harry said, giving a thumbs up to Angelina.

“Harry’s right. Look at me. You made me what I am.” said Ron.

“Hey, Angie. You’re the best.” Katie gave a hug to Angelina, who looked like she was about to cry.

“All right, then. It’s time to put our names on that Quidditch Cup. Harry, you ready to settle that score with Diggory?”

“Way ahead of ya on that front. He won’t know what hit him, Cap’n.” Harry gave a salute to Angelina.

“Good. Harry, you don’t have to play interference. Focus on the snitch. The moment you see it, you catch it. We have the advantage in points, and I don’t want to take any risks. End the game as fast as possible. Fred and Goerge, keep the bludgers away from us. Ron, make Hufflepuff chasers cry.” Angelina finished her fiery pep talk.

“The players are now taking their brooms and setting themselves into formations. Hufflepuff and Gryffindor chasers look to take up positions favourable for attack backed up by their beaters. It looks like Cedric Diggory is opting to lend his hand to his chasers, or maybe not. Never know what Diggory would do, but Harry Potter looks like he is hanging out with Ron Weasley near the hoops. Not sure what they’re talking about, but I hope it’s some last-minute strategy.” Lee Jordan commented.

Madam Hooch blew the whistle, and the game started off with Fred taking a beating down the bludger against the quaffle, settling the ball safely into Angelina’s safe hands.

“Look at Angelina Johnson go – she’s a pro in evasion tactics.” Lee Jordan claimed from the commentary box.

Sure enough, Harry could see Angelina making a beeline for the Hufflepuff keeper with the quaffle while Fred and George kept the bludgers away from her path. Angelina veered off to the right forcing Hufflepuff keeper Eddy Grear to mimic her. Unfortunately for Grear, Angelina threw the quaffle behind her straight into Katie’s hands. The Gryffindor stands erupted with cheers as Katie Bell punched the quaffle through the hoop with precision. Lee Jordan was praising Angelina for executing a perfect and timely reverse pass.

Harry meanwhile blocked out the game and went straight down to the ground. He could feel Cedric trailing behind him. Harry picked up the speed as he started a classic spiral dive, one of the manoeuvres used by seekers to catch the snitch in a dive quickly.

“Look at Harry Potter! He is executing a spiral dive to clinch the snitch. Cedric Diggory is right behind his tail.” Lee Jordan shouted off from the commentary box.

Harry made sure to increase his speed slightly, and when he was sure Cedric had fallen right behind him, Harry reached out with his hand as if to catch the snitch.

“Harry Potter is reaching out with his hand. Does he have the snitch?” Lee shouted impatiently.

Harry smiled as he could feel Cedric commit fully to the dive and force his broom to full speed.

With one hand on the broom, Harry pulled out of the dive at the last second. Before the eyes of every student at Hogwarts, he performed a Wronski Feint.

“Would you look at that! Harry Potter has executed a Wronski Feint. But Diggory has managed to stave off the worst by somehow managing to arrest his speed. Still, the Hufflepuff captain looks to have sustained some injury to his leg. A good piece of flying on display by the two seekers.”

Harry turned out what Lee Jordan was saying and focused on the snitch. He blasted off towards the stands, and sure enough, his senses were not failing him. The snitch was hiding right on top of a flagpole. He urged the Firebolt to go faster and tried to snatch the immobile snitch, but it flew away at the last second. Harry didn't let up on the chase as he quickly manoeuvred his broom after the fleeing snitch. He had to dive underneath Zacharias Smith, who was trying desperately to snatch the quaffle from Alicia. Harry's arrival spooked Smith into giving Alicia to pass the quaffle to Angelina, who scored another goal for Gryffindor.

The screams and shouts from the stands blasted into his ears, but Harry's eyes were on the snitch. The snitch suddenly came to a halt and dived, forcing Harry to do the same. The snitch came level with the ground, just a few inches above the grass and flew parallel to the floor. Harry was also forced to do the same, pulling out of the dive and getting level just above the ground. He pushed the Firebolt to full speed closing the distance with the snitch fast. When he threw out his arm, he could feel the beating wings of the snitch struggling against his palm.

“I caught you, you troublemaker.” Harry whispered while looking at the snitch, which stopped beating its wings, accepting defeat.

The stands erupted into cheers as Harry raised his fist, showing off the golden snitch in the palm of his left hand.

“He'd done it! Potter has done it. He has got the snitch. Gryffindor wins the match 180-20. Gryffindor wins the Quidditch Cup!” Lee Jordan happily exclaimed, jumping out of his seat and hugging Professor McGonagall.

Harry flew straight towards Angelina and presented her with the snitch.

“I told you we'd win.”

“Yes, you did, Harry.” Angelina smiled and hugged him as the team converged around their captain.

“We won!” Angelina cried. “It was my last game, and we won!”

The group hug lasted quite a while, and Harry had to say it was nice to be on the winning team.