

Chapter 37

“Harry, we need to talk.”

Harry looked up from his breakfast at Lily, Narcissa, and Bellatrix. They stood in front of him with arms crossed over their chests, faces set with determination.

“What did I do?” he asked.

Lily blinked in surprise and then shared a look with Narcissa and Bellatrix. They relaxed their stances a moment later and let their arms fall to their sides. Sylvia suppressed a smile as she set Amanda’s plate in front of her and sat.

“It’s not something you did,” Lily said. “It’s something we want you to do.”

“You need to take a break,” Narcissa added. “We want you to take this weekend off.”

“I can’t,” Harry said. “There’s too much to do.”

“You don’t have to do everything on your own,” Lily said softly. “I owled Mary, and she’s agreed to help Dorcas and Marlene at Mirror Image. And the Wolf’s Den can run on its own for a couple of days. The next full moon doesn’t happen for weeks.”

Bellatrix rested her hands on the table and bent at the waist, giving him a tantalizing glimpse down her loose blouse.

“We’ll make it worth your while,” she purred, her violet eyes sparkling.

Sylvia covered Amanda's eyes with her hand, causing her to giggle as she tried to blindly stab her eggs with her fork.

"They're right," Sylvia said. "You're no good to anyone if you burn yourself out."

"I'll see what I can do," Harry sighed.

"Thank you," Lily said.

Smiling, he cleaned his plate, stood, and placed it in the sink. The girls walked around the table so that each of them could give him a hug and a kiss. Bellatrix cheekily grabbed his bum and gave him a wink as he pulled back.

"I need to get going," he said.

Walking over to Sylvia, he curled his fingers under her chin and lifted her head to press a kiss against her lips. Amanda giggled and smiled brightly as he moved over and kissed the top of her head.

"You be good for Mummy, okay?" Harry asked.

"I will," she replied softly.

Smiling and caressing her hair, he turned and made his way into the living room.

"Potter Manor," he said, pressing the tip of his wand to the mirror.

The image shimmered for a moment before he found himself looking at Dorea as she sat on the couch, reading a magazine.

“Morning,” Harry said brightly. “Mind if I come through?”

“Not at all,” Dorea smiled, setting aside the magazine.

When he stepped through, she greeted him with a hug and a kiss on the cheek.

“It’s good to see you again, dear,” she said, patting his arms with a motherly smile. “How are the girls doing?”

“Good,” Harry smiled. “They told me I need to take the weekend off.”

“They’re not wrong,” Dorea said. “You do too much.”

“I don’t have much choice at the moment,” he replied with a shrug.

“Mistress,” an old House Elf, heavily wrinkled and stooped, called. “Breakfast is served.”

“Thank you, Chester,” Dorea said. “We’ll be along in a moment.”

With a bow, Chester Disapparated with a soft pop.

“Are you hungry?” she asked Harry, looping her arm through his and leading him towards the kitchen.

“No, I just ate,” he told her. “How are the repairs coming?”

“Almost finished,” Dorea answered. “The house is fixed, but Charlus has decided to upgrade the wards. The Warders will be here Thursday.”

Harry nodded as they entered the dining room. Charlus sat at the head of the table, leafing through the morning edition of the Daily Prophet while sipping a cup of coffee.

“Morning, love,” Dorea said. “Look who decided to visit.”

Charlus looked up from the paper, smiled, and got to his feet.

“Harry,” he said cheerfully and pulled him in for a hug. “How are you holding up?”

“I’m alright,” Harry said, taking a seat.

“Have you seen this morning’s paper?” Charlus asked, handing the Daily Prophet to him.

Harry looked at the front page, which featured a large picture of Mirror Image. The picture showed a long line of excited shoppers leading all the way back to the Leaky Cauldron.

“They’re saying that your mirrors will eventually lead to the death of the Floo Network as a whole,” Charlus grinned. They’re calling it the invention of the millennia.”

“I wouldn’t go that far,” Harry snorted, setting down the paper. “But speaking of the Daily Prophet, I had a question for you.”

“Alright,” he nodded.

“Hypothetically, if someone had information but they didn’t trust the Ministry or the Daily Prophet to do the right thing, how could they go about making it public?” Harry asked.

“What kind of information?” Charlus asked, his brow furrowed curiously.

“Information that would link several Ministry officials with known Death Eaters,” Harry said.

Charlus sighed, “That’s tricky.”

“Wouldn’t it help if this person just so happened to have a magical device he could use to broadcast anything he wanted?” Dorea asked, giving Harry a pointed look.

“Only if enough people had them,” Harry agreed.

“I see,” Dorea frowned. “The Wireless, perhaps?”

“Maybe,” Charlus muttered. “But you’d have to hijack a broadcast when people are listening.”

“What if we started our own newspaper?” Harry asked.

“That could work,” he nodded. “But it would take time to generate an audience.”

“Unless we could attach a famous name to it,” Dorea added.

“It would help,” Charlus agreed. “It wouldn’t have the reach of the Prophet, but it might be enough. Do you want me to look into it?”

“If you have the time,” Harry nodded.

“I’ll take care of it,” Dorea said, causing Harry and Charlus to look at her in surprise.

“What?” Dorea asked, lifting her chin. “I can’t let you two do all the work now, can I? Besides, it’s about time we reminded the world why you don’t mess with our family.”

Grinning, Charlus leaned over and gave her a kiss just as James stumbled sleepily through the doorway.

“Ew,” he said, wrinkling his nose.

“Oh, hush,” Dorea said.

Sirius and Remus stumbled into the room after James, looking like they’d just gotten out of bed.

“How are you doing, Remus?” Harry asked.

“Brilliant,” Remus smiled. “Never better.”

“Good,” Harry grinned.

“Oh, that reminds me,” Charlus said. “We’re voting whether to approve your idea of forcing the cure on captured Werewolves today. Are you coming to the meeting?”

Harry sighed and leaned back in his chair.

“I suppose I should,” he said. “I can’t go to Hogwarts until Dumbledore gets done anyway.”

“Why would you go to Hogwarts?” Sirius asked incredulously. “It’s Summer!”

“Just helping with a little cleanup,” Harry replied.

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“Urgh, I hate those meetings,” Harry said as he appeared next to Dumbledore outside the main gate of Hogwarts.

Taking off his plum-colored robes, he stuffed them into his pocket.

“Quite understandable,” Dumbledore smiled. “However, you achieved quite the victory today. I never thought I’d see the end of Lycanthropy in my lifetime. The ICW is putting its full weight behind distributing your cure to every country possible. I haven’t seen International Magical Cooperation on this scale since the war with Grindelwald.”

“If only they could deal with Voldemort the same way, he wouldn’t stand a chance,” Harry sighed.

Dumbledore chuckled, “One step at a time, young Harry, one step at a time.”

Shaking his head, Harry led the way into the castle and up to the second floor. It was eerily quiet inside. Harry hated seeing Hogwarts so empty. It was a poignant reminder that kids like him could have stayed there instead of returning to a home where they weren’t wanted.

“We need to talk to the School Board about keeping this place open over the Summer,” Harry said. “It would only take a small staff to watch a couple of kids over the Summer.”

“You’d have to convince the teachers to stay as well, and they do enjoy their break,” Dumbledore said.

"It doesn't have to be the teachers," Harry pointed out. "You don't need to teach them. Just keep an eye on them. And it would have made a huge difference to someone like me, Sirius, or even Tom."

"Do you think it would have changed what he became?" Dumbledore asked curiously.

Harry paused for a moment to think.

"No," he admitted, shaking his head. "But they might have realized what he was sooner."

"Perhaps," Dumbledore nodded. "I've often wondered if there was something I could have done to turn him for the path he took. I shall bring it up at the next meeting, but I don't expect them to change their minds."

"Then, I'll do something about it," Harry said. "It should only take a few months to cure all the Werewolves in Britain. Once that's done, maybe I can turn the house into an orphanage."

Dumbledore chuckled and patted Harry on the shoulder as they reached the girls' toilet. Pushing the door open, Harry walked inside and looked around. Even Moaning Myrtle was on holiday, it seemed. As Dumbledore entered behind him, he walked over to the sink and quickly found the tap with the snake etched into the side.

"*Open,*" he hissed.

The sink rumbled as it descended into the floor, revealing a deep, dark hole.

"Interesting," Dumbledore said.

"We have to jump down. I'll warn you, it's a bit of a ride," Harry said, stepping up to the hole and then glancing over his shoulder with a smirk. "Try not to break a hip."

He stepped into the hole and fell rapidly into the pitch-black, slimy pipe that led to the sewers of Hogwarts. Shooting out of the end, he landed on his at speed and stumbled a bit while the bones of long dead rodents crunched under his feet.

“I hate this part,” Harry said, lighting his wand and cleaning the slime off of his clothes.

A moment later, Dumbledore came shooting out of the pipe. His clothes looked immaculate, and he landed so gracefully that he suspected magic had to be involved. It was enough to make him slightly jealous.

“I would not have expected Slytherin to use such an... undignified entrance,” Dumbledore said, gazing around curiously.

“Hm, I suppose you’re right,” Harry conceded. “I never really thought about it, to be honest. I had bigger concerns at the time. Do you think there are other entrances?”

“Oh, certainly,” Dumbledore nodded. “It’s likely this is merely the entrance for the Basilisk. I suspect Slytherin would have used an entrance closer to the dungeons. Possibly more than one.”

“We can check the Chamber once we deal with the Basilisk,” Harry suggested with a shrug. “I didn’t really stick around to see what else was there last time.”

“Understandable,” Dumbledore nodded.

Holding his wand aloft, Harry led the way down the long pipe that he knew led to the entrance of the Chamber of Secrets. It seemed smaller than he remembered. He and Dumbledore had to stoop to make it through. Fortunately, it wasn’t a long walk, and they soon found themselves at the elaborate door that would take them to the Chamber proper.

“This leads straight into the Chamber,” Harry said, gesturing to the door. “Inside, there’s a statue of Slytherin with a mouth that opens. That’s where the snake was last time, but I don’t know if it’s already there or if Tom put it there.”

“I suspect it’s hibernating,” Dumbledore said. “I wonder how it feeds itself. It couldn’t possibly sustain itself solely on the rats and mice living here.”

“I don’t know,” Harry shrugged. “I don’t know much about Basilisks. A couple of owners of the Elder Wand bred them but only let them live until they were a few weeks old. That’s when their gaze starts to turn deadly.”

“Then let us be cautious,” Dumbledore said.

Nodding, Harry turned back to the door.

“*Open,*” he said.

The snakes slithered, disengaging the locks, and then the door swung open slightly. Harry peeked inside, careful to keep his eyes low and ready to close them at the first sign of movement. When he saw nothing out of place, he carefully stepped inside with Dumbledore right behind him. Slowly and cautiously, straining his ears for any hint of slithering, Harry crossed the bridge and stepped onto the main platform.

“I don’t think it’s here,” he said. “Should I open the statue?”

Dumbledore nodded, “I believe that’s our best option.”

Taking a deep breath, Harry turned the statue.

“How did I let you talk me into this?” he muttered before raising his voice. *“Speak to me, Salazar Slytherin, greatest of the Hogwarts four.”*

The sound of stone grinding against stone filled the Chamber as the mouth slowly fell open. Slytherin’s gaping mouth revealed a long, dark pipe at the back of his throat. As the room fell eerily silent, they waited for the snake to appear, but after several long moments, there was nothing. Harry looked back at Dumbledore, who shrugged helplessly. Sighing, he crept closer to the statue and peered cautiously inside.

“Hello!” he called. *“Is anyone there?”*

He didn’t expect a reply, but almost immediately, he heard the sound of slithering. Backpedaling to stand next to Dumbledore, Harry tightened his grip on his wand and kept his eyes on the floor. He couldn’t see the Basilisk as it entered the Chamber, but he could hear it. A moment later, he caught a glimpse of its scaly underbelly as its massive shadow fell over them.

“Hello, can you understand me?” Harry asked.

There was a long pause as the snake hissed quietly.

“Yess,” it replied in a high-pitched, feminine tone.

“It understands me,” he told Dumbledore.

“Ask it why it was placed here,” the headmaster replied.

“Can you tell me why you are here?” Harry asked politely.

“Protect... from... Muggles,” the Basilisk responded.

“To protect the castle from Muggles,” he said. “I don’t think she can tell us much. Her speech is slow and broken. It’s like she can barely speak.”

“Likely from too much time on her own,” Dumbledore nodded. “Ask her about Tom. We need to know if her allegiance is to him or the school.”

Harry licked his dry lips as he thought about how to word his next question.

“Do you remember the last boy that was here?” He asked.

“Yess,” the snake hissed, shifting slightly.

“This man is Albus Dumbledore, headmaster of this school,” Harry said, gesturing to Dumbledore. *“If that boy returned, would you obey him or the leader of the school?”*

“Must... obey... master,” the Basilisk replied.

“She said she must obey her master,” Harry said.

“Ah,” Dumbledore sighed sadly. “Slytherin likely used some sort of enchantment to ensure her loyalty. If I were to examine her, I might be able to break it.”

“Speak... like... master... Smell... wrong,” the Basilisk hissed.

“Bugger,” Harry said. “I don’t think you’re going to get the chance. She knows I’m not a Slytherin.”

The Basilisk hissed threateningly, and he watched her shadow as she reared back to strike.

“Fawkes!” Dumbledore yelled.

There was a flash of orange light and the Chamber was filled with Phoenix song. Harry and the headmaster moved to the edge of the platform as Fawkes began dive-bombing the snake’s massive head, attempting to gouge out her eyes with his claws. It was an odd repeat of the events of his second year, but this time, Harry wasn’t going to spectate. Looking as high up on the Basilisk’s body as he dared, he whipped his wand forward.

A bright, fiery whip wrapped around the snake’s neck. Its magically resistant scales born the brunt of the flames hot enough to melt iron, but it was enough to limit the movement of its head. Fawkes cawed victoriously as he landed on the Basilisk’s head and clawed out both its eyes.

The great snake thrashed in pain, hauling Harry off his feet and sending him flying a dozen feet through the air. As he landed, he rolled out of the way of the flailing tail. It slammed onto the stone floor beside him with enough force to shatter bone. He scrambled out of the way and back to his feet while Dumbledore hurled powerful magic at the Basilisk’s body.

“It’s hide is stronger than I expected,” he said, sounding more interested than worried.

“Aim for the mouth,” Harry yelled, raising his wand.

They both hurled spells, but it was moving its head too much for them to score a solid hit. Hissing furiously, the Basilisk turned and dove head-first into the pool surrounding the bridge and the back of the platform. Harry and Dumbledore kept their wands ready while they waited for it to reappear. The seconds ticked by, but there was nothing. Even the ripples on the surface died and yet they saw no sign of the snake.

“Did it run away?” Harry asked.

The slight splash of water he spotted out of the corner of his eye was the only warning Harry got as the Basilisk launched itself out of the water. He dove out of the way but not quite fast enough

to avoid getting hit by the snake's body. Spinning through the air, he landed heavily on his back. Dumbledore followed the Basilisk, sending hexes and curses powerful enough to chip the stone floor and walls, but the ones that hit its bright green scales bounced off harmlessly. With shocking speed, it turned and slithered back into the water just as Harry got back to his feet.

"I think we need a new plan," Dumbledore said softly.

Harry took a deep breath as he considered his options. The Basilisk was attacking based on sound, just as it had the last time he fought it. An idea came to mind, but it was only marginally less stupid than the one he used the first time. Unfortunately, it was the only one he could come up with, and he couldn't exactly talk to Dumbledore about it first—not without getting attacked by the Basilisk, at least.

Closing his eyes, Harry held out his hand.

I need the sword of Gryffindor to protect Hogwarts, he thought.

The reassuring weight of the hilt appeared in his hand, and Harry curled his fingers around it before it could fall. Dumbledore watched him curiously as he opened his eyes and turned to face the water. With a helpless shrug, he dropped the tip of the sword, and the sound of metal ringing filled the Chamber.

This time, Harry didn't wait for the explosion of water before he began moving. He took several quick steps to the side as the Basilisk launched itself at where he had been. Before it had even landed, he sprinted back the way he came and leapt into the air. Raising the sword of Gryffindor high above his head, he landed on the snake's back and sank it tip-first into the top of the Basilisk's skull.

The great snake roared and thrashed. Harry tried to hold on, but the sword slipped from his grasp, and he once again found himself landing hard on the stone floor. Sitting up painfully, he watched as the Basilisk flailed in its death throes before it finally collapsed to the floor, where it lay motionless.

With a groan, Harry laid back on the wet floor and winced.

“You haven’t broken your hip, I hope,” Dumbledore said, standing over him with a smile.

Harry gave him a flat look, and the headmaster chuckled while offering him a hand up. Walking over to the Basilisk, Dumbledore pulled the sword from its head and examined it closely.

“Remarkable,” he said before stowing it in his robes as Fawkes came to land lightly on Harry’s shoulder. “Now, shall we take a look around?”