

Chapter 30

“Professor Slughorn likes to go back to his office after breakfast,” Hermione reminded Harry. “But he only stays there for about half an hour before going to the greenhouses and wandering the grounds. That’ll be the best time to catch him.”

“Got it,” Harry nodded.

“Do these plans you make ever actually work?” Tonks asked.

“Well...,” Hermione began.

“Partly.... Sometimes,” Harry admitted. “Really, it just makes us feel better.”

“Whatever works,” Tonks shrugged, handing him the vial of Felix Felicis.

Pulling the stopper, Harry took a deep breath and carefully drank half of the potion. Surprisingly, it tasted sparkly and bright, not at all like all the other foul, bitter potions he’d drank in the past. A feeling of blissful calm came over him, bringing a smile to his face. All of his worries faded into the background.

“How do you feel?” Hermione asked curiously.

“Brilliant!” Harry replied. “I think I’m going to go for a walk.”

“But you need to catch Slughorn in his office,” she reminded him.

“Meeting him now just doesn’t feel right,” Harry said, making his way to the door. “I’ll look for him later. I have a really good feeling about the Dungeons right now.”

“What? The Dungeons? Harry!” Hermione yelled.

“Just let him go, Hermione,” Tonks said, placing a hand on her shoulder as she made to follow him. “Between his instincts and the potion, I’m sure he knows what he’s doing.”

“But I had a plan all worked out,” Hermione moaned.

“I know,” Tonks said, patting her shoulder consolingly.

Smiling, Harry stepped out of the portrait hole and headed towards the stairs. For the first time since he’d arrived at the school, he didn’t have to wait for one of them to move where he wanted. Everything lined up perfectly, and even the trick step at the bottom forgot to trick him.

Stepping onto the first floor, Harry spotted Katie’s friend, Leanne, trip over her bag as she took a step back. Without breaking stride, he caught her bridal style, smiled at her shocked expression, and set her back on her feet.

“Thanks, Harry!” Leanne yelled after him.

“You’re welcome,” Harry replied.

He garnered odd looks from a few Slytherins when he turned and headed down into the dungeons. A small group of first years gave him a frightened look and scurried quickly out of his way, but he ignored them as he turned left, then right on a whim.

“I told you to leave my sister alone, Malfoy! If you have a problem with what happened over break, you can take it up with me.”

Harry recognized Daphne’s voice easily and stopped around the corner from a small, dead-end hallway before peeking around the corner. Malfoy, Crabbe, and Goyle had Daphne, Astoria, and Gabrielle backed against the far wall. He raised an eyebrow when he noticed Malfoy with two wands, his stance one of arrogant confidence. The boys stood in a slight V formation, with Crabbe and Goyle a step behind the blonde. A smirk stretched across Harry’s face when he saw the suits of armor flanking them.

“You think you’re so smart, running to Potter for help, aren’t you?” Malfoy asked nastily. “It’s only a matter of time until the Dark Lord catches up with him, and when he does, you’ll pay for siding with him.”

“I’ll take my chances,” Daphne told him defiantly. “Now, give me back my wand.”

“Or what?” Malfoy asked.

As Crabbe and Goyle chuckled, cracking their knuckles menacingly, Harry waved his wand down the hall. The suits of armor jerked to life, raising their arms above their heads, swords pointed towards the ceiling. Just as Crabbe and Goyle noticed the movement, they brought the pommels down on the tops of their heads with a *thunk!*

Malfoy spun around, his face paling as he watched the two boys slump to the floor, unconscious. Spinning back around, he aimed his wand at Daphne’s chest, his hand visibly shaking.

“W-what did you do!?” he yelled fearfully.

With a smirk, Harry perfectly aimed a silent banishing charm at the back of his wand. The wand came free from his grip, tumbled through the air, and landed perfectly in Daphne’s hand. Remarkably, she caught it and managed to keep the surprise off of her face.

“Not everyone is defenseless without a wand,” she said with a glare.

Stumbling back a step, Malfoy raised his wand threateningly. Before he could even open his mouth, Daphne disarmed him, letting his wand sail over her shoulder, where it clattered against the wall. Without missing a beat, she moved her aim to his groin and fired off a powerful Bludgeoning Hex.

The impact was so forceful that Malfoy was lifted off of his feet and sent flying a few feet down the hall, where he landed painfully on his back. Not that he noticed. He was too busy sobbing and holding his crotch to feel much of anything else.

“Listen, Malfoy, I’m not going to tell you this again,” Daphne said threateningly. “You leave me and my sister alone. I don’t care why Snape and Dumbledore are so set on keeping you around. If you pull this shit again, I will fucking end you.”

Rearing her foot back, she kicked him hard in the stomach and stepped over him, waving for Astoria and Gabrielle to follow her. It wasn’t until she got to the corridor that she spotted Harry, and her shoulders sagged in relief.

“Ha-” Gabrielle began, but Daphne silenced her by placing her hand over her mouth.

“Not here,” she whispered, looking meaningfully back at Malfoy, Crabbe, and Goyle.

Gabrielle blushed and nodded in understanding. Taking Harry by the arm, Daphne led him down the hall and into the unoccupied Potions Classroom. After Astoria and Gabrielle followed them in, she closed the door behind them.

“Thank you,” she said gratefully. “If you’d just hexed him, he’d have tried this again. Now that he thinks I can do wandless magic, he’ll be more cautious. How did you know we were in trouble anyways?”

“I didn’t,” Harry shrugged. “Just lucky I happened to be passing by, I guess.”

Daphne looked at him curiously and then shook her head.

“You should tell Amelia what happened,” he continued. “I don’t like how Dumbledore is ignoring everything that’s going on. It’s like he wants Malfoy to do something.”

“I get that feeling, too,” Daphne said. “I’ve been trying to find out what he’s up to, but no one will tell me anything. They know Malfoy is a Death Eater and don’t want to risk angering him. All I can tell you is that he disappears at odd hours. Sometimes, he skips class, or he won’t return to the common room all night. I don’t know where he goes, though.”

“That’s alright,” Harry smiled. “I’m sure we’ll figure it out soon.”

“Did someone hit you with a Cheering Charm?” Daphne asked, eyeing him closely.

“Felix Felicis,” Harry grinned. “Speaking of which, I need to get going. Have a good day, girls.”

“Wait! Why did you take Liquid Luck, and where are you going?” Daphne asked curiously.

“I’ll tell you later,” Harry called over his shoulder as he walked towards the door. “I need to get to Hagrid’s.”

Throwing the door open, Harry made his way out of the dungeon and back up to the first floor. When he reached the top of the stairs, he spotted Crabbe and Goyle dragging Malfoy across the Entry Hall towards the Hospital Wing. Smirking, he hit them with a Tripping Jinx, sending all three of them sprawling on the floor before turning and slipping outside.

Making his way across the front lawn, Harry reached Hagrid’s hut just as Professor Slughorn was knocking on his door.

“Good morning, Professor,” Harry smiled.

“Ah, good morning, Harry,” Slughorn said, lowering his hand. “If you’re here to see Hagrid, I’m afraid he’s not here.”

“Just passing by,” Harry said. “Thought I’d say hello on my way out.”

“Out?” Slughorn asked curiously. “Out where?”

“Godric’s Hollow,” Harry replied, the potion guiding his words.

“What!?” Slughorn yelled in surprise, rushing to catch up to Harry, who began walking towards the front gate. “Professor Dumbledore is letting you go there by yourself?”

Harry shrugged, "I don't rightly know, I didn't ask."

"Now, Harry, my boy, you can't just leave the castle grounds at a time like this," Slughorn said, huffing slightly. "It's far too dangerous for you to go alone."

"Then, by all means, feel free to come along, professor," Harry said as he continued to walk.

"I – Well, if Professor Dumbledore hasn't given his permission –" Slughorn stammered. "I really should take you back to the castle."

"With all due respect, I'll just leave again," Harry told him honestly. "Maybe I'll take my broom next time. It's a lovely day to go flying."

"And just how do you plan on getting there?" Slughorn asked, looking slightly irritated. "Or past the wards, for that matter."

Coming to a stop at the Front Gate, Harry reached out and turned the handle easily. Professor Slughorn gaped in shock as he passed through the wards without issue.

"The wards are designed to keep people out, not in," Harry said, smiling as he turned back. "As for getting to Godric's Hollow, I was thinking about Apparating."

"But you don't have your license," Slughorn said, cautiously stepping past the wards.

"Actually, I do," Harry grinned. "Amelia gave it to me over break after she came to stay with us. She even gave me a permit to make Portkeys."

"Amelia Bones? Really? Good heavens!" Slughorn exclaimed, eyes wide in surprise.

"Well, thanks for walking with me, professor, but I really should get going," Harry said. "If you don't want to all for someone to unlock the gate, you could always use the secret tunnel in the Shrieking Shack to sneak back in. Just watch out for the Whomping Willow on your way out."

“Wait-”

He didn't. Harry Disapparated with a *pop*, appearing a moment later in the quiet village of Godric's Hollow behind one of the small shops along High Street. Walking out from behind the shop, he walked down the sidewalk, the potion guiding his feet in the right direction. It took only a couple of minutes for him to come across his old home, looking deserted, run-down, and overgrown. On the second floor, the back left corner of the roof was missing, and a chunk of the wall had been blown into the yard below. There was a waist-high wooden fence surrounding the property. There, on the gate, sat a wooden plaque.

The plaque commemorated the death of his parents and his survival of the Killing Curse. All around the golden letters, people had carved their names into the wood. Harry swallowed thickly, not certain how he felt about the plaque or the carvings. Reaching out, he opened the gate just as he heard running footsteps behind him.

“Harry, wait!” Slughorn yelled, huffing and holding a stitch in his side as he ran to catch up.

Harry ignored him again and slowly pushed open the front door, which hung on at an angle, the wood cracked from a great force. Slughorn panted heavily as he wandered inside, looking around the familiar room.

“I was there, on the couch,” Harry said, pointing to the middle cushion. “My dad was making bubbles with his wand while mum was reading a book in that chair. She kept looking over and smiling at us. She had a pretty smile.”

“You – you remember it?” Slughorn asked, his face paling and his jowls quivering.

“It's the memory Dementors make me relive,” Harry said absently, his eyes unfocused as he looked towards the front door. “We all felt the wards when Voldemort came through them. Even as a baby I knew something was wrong. My dad told my mum to take me a run. She ran up the stairs just as the front door was blown open. I remember a green flash and then the sound of something heavy hitting the floor. My mum sobbed, but she kept running upstairs.”

Slughorn, pale and shaking, opened his mouth to respond, but nothing came out. Turning on his heel, Harry headed slowly up the stairs. After hesitating briefly, Slughorn followed him. The wall to the left at the top of the stairs was completely missing, and the roof above them was broken. Large, missing chunks let in the early morning sunlight. Surprisingly, no leaves or other debris had fallen through the large gaps. Harry suspected magic was involved.

They took a right at the top and walked to the destroyed nursery. His old crib still sat against the back wall, but that was really the only thing left standing. The plaster on the walls was completely shattered and broken, and the dresser holding his baby clothes was laying on its side, drawers hanging open. A wooden rocking chair lay shattered in the corner, only the curved legs giving away what the pile of sticks used to be.

Stepping inside, Harry walked to the crib and rested his hands on the edge. Slughorn stayed in the doorway, looking around with a weary sadness in his eyes.

“My mum stood here,” Harry said. “Voldemort told her to stand aside. He gave her a chance to live. She refused; begged him to kill her and let me live. He just killed her anyways. I remember him stepping over her body and looking down at with me a smirk. Then there was a bright light, and that’s it. That’s all that I remember.”

“Harry,” Slughorn said softly.

“He should’ve died that night, but he didn’t,” Harry continued, spinning around to face him. “He did something to himself. Something that kept him alive, and you know what it is.”

Slughorn stared at him like a deer caught in headlights. Terrified, but unable to look away.

“Professor, I need you to give me that memory,” Harry pressed. “If you don’t, all of this – this pain – this suffering, all of it will be for nothing. It will happen again, and it will keep happening until I know what he did and how to stop it.”

Slughorn continued to stare, and Harry held his gaze patiently. After a long moment, Slughorn reached both hands into the pockets of his robes. Pulling out a wand with his right hand, and a empty vial in his left, he closed his eyes and took a shaky breath. A tear leaked from his eye as he pressed the tip of his

wand to his temple and drew away a long, silvery memory. Carefully dropping the memory into the vial with his shaking hands, he corked it and began to sniffled.

"I'm so sorry," he sobbed softly. "I didn't know. I didn't know what he would become – what he'd do. I –"

"it's alright, professor," Harry said, taking the vial and patting his shoulder. "I forgive you."

He didn't, but he couldn't bring himself to berate the man while he was crying. There was no point. He was already broken.

Gently, he guided him out of the room and back down the stairs. As the portly man took a moment to gather himself, Harry looked around the house and spotted a book near the chair. He knew it must have been the book his mother had been reading when they were attacked. Walking over to it, he bent down and picked it up. On the cover, in faded gold letters, it read, *'The Secrets of Charms'*

"Ministry Aurors, come out now!"

"Oh, dear," Slughorn said, wiping his face with a handkerchief. "They must've put up wards to alert them if someone came in."

"I'll deal with it," Harry said.

Pocketing the book, he strode towards the door and stepped outside. The Aurors - a wizard who looked only a little older than Harry and an older witch with grey hair and a black patch over one eye – stared at him in surprise.

"Is there a problem?" Harry asked as Slughorn came to join him.

"Er," the younger Auror stammered, looking to the older witch for help.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Potter," the woman apologized. "We thought it was kids going in on a dare. It happens from time to time. I apologize for the interruption."

“That’s alright,” Harry said, giving her a small smile. “We were just leaving.”

“Then we’ll leave you to your day,” she said.

Nodding to the other Auror, they Disapparated, leaving the street empty. In silence, Harry and Slughorn walked back down the street and ducked behind the first building they could. Harry took the professor’s arm and side-along Apparated him to the end of the road near the Shrieking Shack.

“Why didn’t you Apparate us to the Front Gate?” Slughorn asked.

“I figured you wouldn’t want Dumbledore to know about our little trip,” Harry said.

Leading the way to the Shrieking Shack, he pried the door open with his wand and slipped inside. Slughorn looked around curiously while Harry moved aside the rug and opened the trap door in the floor.

“There’s a tunnel that comes out under the Whomping Willow here,” Harry told him. “It’s a bit cramped, but the only other way in is the passage from Honeyduke’s and it’ll be hard to slip into the basement this time of day without being seen.”

“You mean there are two ways to sneak past the wards?” Slughorn asked in alarm.

“Only a few people know about them,” Harry replied.

In truth, he was almost certain Dumbledore knew about the passages and had them warded. He just wouldn’t say anything about it unless he had a reason to. For all of his faults, he allowed teens to be teens, even if that meant getting up to mischief on occasion.

Jumping down into the tunnel, Harry lit his wand and led the way. The ceiling dipped in places, forcing them to duck at times, but it was still big enough for them to walk normally most of the time. As they walked, Slughorn filled the silence by telling Harry stories about his mother. It took several minutes, but

they eventually reached the exit and crawled out from between the roots of the Whomping Willow. Pressing the knot to still the limbs, he fought not to laugh while Slughorn struggled out of the tight gap.

“Well,” Slughorn huffed, getting to his feet. “As cathartic as this has been, I think I’m going to go back to my office and have a nice stiff drink. I normally wouldn’t offer the same for a student, but given the circumstances...”

“Thank you, professor, but I’ll have to decline,” Harry said, smiling woodenly as he gripped the vial in his pocket. “I have something to care of.”

‘Ah, right. Of course,” Slughorn said, clearing his throat awkwardly. “I’ll leave you to it, then.”

Forcing a smile, he patted Harry on the shoulder and made his way back towards the castle. Harry took the vial out of his pocket and eyed the silvery substance inside before turning and heading towards Dumbledore’s office. Hopefully, with the memory and a bit of luck, he could finally get some real answers.