

Chapter 14

Nott was dragged forward against his will, his face pale as his toes dragged along the floor.

“Thadeus Nott,” Merlin said, pinning the frightened man in place with his gaze as the Aurors stepped back. “You claim to be innocent in your attempt to assassinate the Minister. Let us see if that is true.”

Without waiting for a reply, Merlin waved his hand, sending the silvery mist swirling around his body and up to the ceiling. Nott began to back away as the image solidified above him but was stopped when Kingsley pressed the tip of his wand to his neck.

High above them, Nott sat at a long table. Known Death Eaters sat on either side of him, and at the head of the table, Voldemort’s snake-like visage stood out stark and pale.

“We need to mitigate Potter and Dumbledore,” Voldemort hissed. “I need more time to gather my forces before we challenge the Ministry. Lucius, what has our dear Minister Fudge told you?”

“I’ve convinced him that this is all a ploy by Dumbledore to steal his position,” Malfoy bragged. “The fool is as good as yours, my lord, he just doesn’t know it. That Umbridge woman may need to be dealt with. Just this morning, she confided in me a plan to send Dementors after Potter. I have convinced her to hold off for the time being.”

“Dementors,” Voldemort hissed, stroking Nagini’s head as she slithered into his lap. “That may just work in our favor. Tell her to send them and ensure Fudge is complicit in case he decides to become obstinate later.”

“But, my lord,” Malfoy said, nervously licking his lips. “I thought you wanted to kill Potter yourself.”

Voldemort turned to look at him sharply, holding his gaze until Malfoy looked away fearfully.

“Do you think a boy who has managed to thwart me so many times will be felled by such a pitiful attack?” Voldemort hissed dangerously. “Do you believe your lord so weak that he cannot accomplish what a few Dementors can?”

“O-of course n-not, my lord,” Malfoy replied softly, sinking into his chair.

“The boy will be mine to kill,” Voldemort said firmly, turning away to look into the distance. “No, Potter will not his end so easily. He will escape, as he always does. With luck, he will be forced to use magic, allowing our dear Minister to further muddy his name. No doubt Dumbledore will come to his aide, sullyng what’s left of his reputation in the process. Now, how is our recruitment going?”

The image faded, and another took its place. The room was the same, but the fear was palpable as Voldemort paced back and forth furiously.

“You allowed yourself to be outwitted by a boy?” he asked in a dangerous whisper.

“My lord, there was nothing I could do,” Malfoy pled. “I wasn’t allowed in the courtroom, and the law he used is bound by ancient magic. If that fool Fudge hadn’t-”

“Crucio!”

Malfoy let out a blood-curdling scream and collapsed to the ground under Voldemort’s wand.

“I don’t want to hear excuses,” Voldemort hissed, lifting the curse. “You’ve lost us the Ministry!”

“M-my lord, I-”

“Silence!” he yelled, returning to his pacing as Malfoy pulled himself back into his chair. “McNair will suffer for being captured.”

Voldemort strode over to the nearest Death Eater and grabbed his arm roughly. Pulling back the sleeve, he pressed the tip of his wand against the Dark Mark. The snake writhed angrily on the skin and all the Death Eaters clutched their forearms, teeth gritted in pain. After a long moment, he lifted his wand, causing everyone at the table to slump forward in relief.

“M-my lord?” the Death Eater whose Dark Marked he’d used asked tentatively.

“We must keep my Death Eaters in the Wizengamot a secret,” Voldemort hissed. “That spell will prevent you from speaking of them. Tell the others in the Ministry to keep watch. If they decide to move against us, we will have plenty of time to react. I need to go to the continent to boost recruitment. Malfoy, Crabbe, Goyle, ramp up your recruitment efforts here and do not get caught. My plans will need to be accelerated. When I return, we will free your brothers and sisters from Azkaban. Do nothing overt until I return, or you will suffer a slow and painful death.”

Voldemort’s cloak flared as he spun and strode angrily from the room. The image faded and reformed, this time on top of a grassy hill.

“Wait!” Harry yelled. “If he could do that, why not hide all of his Death Eaters?”

“Magic like that is complex,” Merlin replied. “I suspect he only hid three to four names at the most. Doing so for all of his Death Eaters would have left him weak for days.”

“Oh,” Harry said, turning his attention back to the cloud above him.

On the hill, Nott and two others, Selwyn and Rosier, both members of the Wizengamot, waited. Without a word being said, the Aurors in the courtroom surrounded the two wizards and stripped them of their wands. Harry wasn’t sure if this kind of evidence would hold up, but he could deal with that later.

His attention was drawn back to the cloud when he heard the sound of a *crack*. Voldemort stepped seamlessly out of thin air, his eyes narrowing at the three figures as they knelt.

“Why have only three of you answered my call?” he hissed.

“My lord,” Selwyn said, bowing low. “Potter is more competent than we expected. He and that bitch, Bones, arrested most of us. We sent the rest into hiding.”

“How many?” Voldemort hissed, sounding more snake than human.

Selwyn shivered in fear, “A-All that were at your rebirth and the first two batches of recruits, my lord.”

“How!?” Voldemort barked.

“T-They sealed the M-Ministry and launched a full a-assault, my lord,” Selwyn stammered.

“Aurors hit all of our homes and safehouses at once. We had no chance to warn them. I was only just released from the Ministry a few minutes ago.”

Voldemort turned away and looked into the distance. With a shout of pure rage, he thrust his wand forward. A massive red, writhing spell leapt from the tip. It traveled over half a mile in just over a second, impacting the side of a distant hill. The explosion sounded like a bomb going off. The top half of the hill was completely destroyed, exposing the dirt and bedrock within.

“Potter will pay for this,” Voldemort hissed softly, pacing back and forth for a long moment.

“Find out where they’re holding my Death Eaters. Focus on finding the most important ones. I want them free before they’re taken to Azkaban.”

The image shifted again, revealing Nott as the one to give Voldemort the information about who was guarding Malfoy and the others. Then it showed the kidnappers that escaped, who turned

out to be new recruits, being tortured for their failure. Harry could see Voldemort losing some grip on his sanity in those moments. It gave him an almost perverse sense of pride that he was causing him so many problems. Next, the Dark Lord ordered the Werewolf attack in an attempt to demoralize Harry. When that failed, Voldemort actually killed one of his Death Eaters in a rage.

“Potter must be stopped,” Voldemort said, now staying in a much less luxurious home than the Malfoy’s. “Nott, I require your services.”

“Of course, my lord,” Nott replied, bowing low.

“We need you to keep your position on the Wizengamot, but you’re uniquely placed to get close to him,” Voldemort said. “Since all of you are incompetent, I’ll be controlling you myself.”

“My lord?” Nott asked nervously.

“You will need proof of the imperious if you are to claim it at your trial,” Voldemort smirked, his eyes glittering with glee as Nott swallowed nervously. “No need to fear. I will ensure they get nothing from you. You will be released shortly, Potter will be dead, and we will free my Death Eaters from Azkaban.”

Nott bowed his head as Voldemort laughed and raised his wand.

“I’m happy to be of service, my lord,” he said.

“Imperio!”

The cloud faded into nothing, and Nott swallowed as all eyes turned to him.

“Aurors, arrest Selwyn and Rosier,” Amelia barked furiously.

“Bring them forward,” Merlin said. “As members of the Sacred Twenty-eight, they are bound by the same oath as Fudge. By taking part in the attempted assassination of the Potter heir and failing to stop it, they shall be punished accordingly.”

The Aurors turned to Harry, who nodded. If Merlin wanted to deal with them and save him the trouble, he was more than happy to comply. Selwyn and Rosier were marched forward at wand point and forced to stand next to Nott.

“Members of the council,” Merlin began. “I put to you that these wizards have forsaken the ancient oath made by their ancestors. They have attempted to end the Potter line and overthrow the Ministry without cause. If you are in agreement, please stand and make yourself known.”

Bartholomew Potter was the first to stand, followed shortly by the others. Not one council member remained seated, their glares directed at the three men held at wand point.

“You are a disgrace to the House of Nott,” one wizard spat. “It disgusts me to see one of my house bow so low to such a monster willingly.”

“When the ancient houses spoke of pure, they meant of magic, not of blood,” a witch that looked like Rosier said, shaking her head. “How you have twisted and perverted what we worked so hard to build.”

“The Council of the Round Table, and later the Wizengamot, were built with a single purpose,” Bartholomew said, standing tall and proud. “To protect all magicals, no matter who or where they come from. You have lost sight of that purpose. Ours is not to rule. Ours is to guide and shelter.”

“You would have us bow to Muggles,” Selwyn spat. “I follow the Dark Lord and the ways of Salazar Slytherin proudly.”

“Then you are a fool,” A wizard, Selwyn’s ancestor Harry presumed, said softly. “You trust the word of a self-proclaimed lord, a usurper, with no understanding of history. Salazar Slytherin once served on this council long before the Ministry was built around it. He hated Muggles because they killed his wife and daughter. He left Hogwarts not because they allowed Muggleborns to attend but because he wanted to remove them from their Muggle parents to protect them. It was a different time - when being magical could see you drowned or burned at the stake. This Dark Lord you follow will only see our world destroyed, and your only motivation is greed. If this is how far our family has fallen, then we do not deserve a voice in this chamber.”

“Nott, Selwyn, Rosier, and Fudge,” Merlin called. “For your crimes, we hereby strip you of all titles, monies, and properties to be given to Lord Potter. It will be up to Magic herself if you are allowed to keep her gift.”

Holding out his hand, the mist swirled and formed a staff in his hand. Merlin banged it on the ground three times, the sound of wood on stone echoing loudly through the chamber. The mist swirled around them, and Harry took a step out of the way. All four men shouted and yelled in fear as they were consumed in a cyclone of thick, silvery clouds. He heard screams, and the mist glowed brightly before shooting straight up. The men trembled before dropping to their knees, pale and covered in sweat.

“What happened?” Harry asked.

“Magic judged them unworthy,” Bartholomew told him.

“The houses of Nott, Selwyn, and Rosier are expelled from the Sacred Twenty-eight,” Magic said. “It will be up to you to vote in worthy replacements. Choose wisely.”

With that, the ghostly table and figures began to fade.

“You have done House Potter proud, young Harry,” Bartholomew smiled.

Harry smiled in return, and they were gone, fading like fog under the sun.

“Get those four out of here,” Amelia said, pointing to Fudge, Selwyn, Rosier, and Nott. “We’ll figure out what to do with them later.”

Standing, Dumbledore raised his hands for quiet.

“Well, that was certainly enlightening,” he said, prompting a bit of laughter. “I think, if there are no objections, we can consider this matter closed.”

Raising his gavel, he brought it down on the block. A loud bang echoed around the chamber, shaking the entire room and causing dust to fall from the ceiling. Surprise rippled through the courtroom, and Dumbledore looked at his gavel in surprise.

Boom!

As the room shook, Harry yelped from a sharp pain in his scar.

“Voldemort,” he said, fighting against the pain and getting to his feet. “He’s here.”

Amelia jumped to her feet, wand appearing in her hand as she followed Harry towards the doors.

“Aurors, with me!” she yelled.

“Harry, perhaps it would be best for you to go back to Headquarters, where it’s safe,” Dumbledore said.

Harry knew it was more of a demand than a suggestion, but he still shook his head.

“No, he’s here for me,” Harry said. “I’m not hiding from him anymore.”

“Harry?” Hermione asked nervously as she, Penny, and Daphne joined them near the doors.
“What’s happening?”

“Voldemort’s here,” he told her, turning into the hall and striding towards the elevator.

“You’re going to fight him, aren’t you?” Penny asked, biting her lip nervously as she took his hand.

“If I have to,” Harry said, stepping into the elevator.

A dozen Aurors poured inside while the rest moved down to the other elevators. Once their car was full, Dumbledore hit the button for the Atrium, the only place the Ministry could be breached from the outside. As they rose closer to the surface, another explosion rocked the building. Bits of debris hit the top of the golden elevator, clanging on the roof.

“Please don’t let me die in a falling elevator,” Tonks said. “I’d never live that down.”

Harry snorted, and some of the tension broke, Aurors chuckling around him. Reaching over, he grabbed Dumbledore’s sleeve and pulled him closer.

“I have an idea,” he said softly. “Trust me.”

Before the headmaster could respond, the elevator came to a stop, and the doors opened. Stepping out, Harry swallowed at the sight of the destroyed Atrium. Rubble from the ceiling lay on the floor in large chunks, sunlight streaming in through the hole in the sidewalk above. The phone booth normally used to ride up and down lie shattered and broken near the Floos. The desk guard was sprawled on the tile floor, his face frozen in an expression of agony, blood dripping from his ears, nose, mouth, and eyes. Several more bodies lay scattered amongst the debris, people slaughtered as they went about their day.

At the center of the carnage stood Voldemort, his red eyes gleaming as he stared at the witch floating in front of him. The woman struggled, letting out choked pleas as she gasped for air. With a negligent flick of his wand, Voldemort ended her life in a flash of green before he turned his gaze on Harry.

“Ah, Harry,” he said, a sickly smile stretching his lips. “So kind of you to join me.”

“Tom,” Harry said, striding forward with a flick of his wand to shut off the Floo.

Voldemort glared at him furiously for the use of his real name.

“I’m surprised Dumbledore let you come,” he said. “Have you finally come to face death, Harry, instead of sending someone else to face it for you?”

Harry tightened his grip on his wand but refused to take the bait.

“So that’s why you’ve done all this?” he asked instead. “Just to kill me?”

“Among other things,” Voldemort smirked. “I must admit, you’ve proved far more competent as Minister than I expected. You’ve caused me more setbacks than I’d care to admit, but no matter. I’ll be rectifying that very soon with your death.”

“And then what?” Harry asked, forcing himself to walk closer to Voldemort and further from his support despite his fear. “You really think killing me will make any difference? If you kill me, there are plenty of other witches and wizards better than I am willing to stand against you.”

“Oh, Harry, once you’re gone, none will dare stand against me,” Voldemort said with a laugh.

“I dare,” Matilda said, taking a step forward.

Voldemort threw his head back and laughed manically.

“This is the best you can offer?” he asked. “An old woman?”

“I dare,” Hermione said, stepping up next to Matilda.

“So do I,” Amelia said, joining them.

“Me too.” “And me,” Penny and Daphne added.

“And us,” Tonks said, taking a step forward.

A moment later, every single Auror took a step forward in unison, their boots sounding like the march of an army.

“You see?” Harry asked. “Say you manage to finally kill me, so what? Say you manage to kill all of us. Do you really think that will be the end? There will always be someone willing to stand up to you, and it’s only a matter of time before they win.”

Voldemort looked truly disconcerted for a moment, his face twisting in confusion before he snarled and slashed his arm through the air.

“Foolish boy!” he yelled. “You know nothing! Your precious Dumbledore hasn’t told you about the prophecy, has he? Keeping secrets are we, Dumbledore?”

“Fuck the prophecy,” Harry said, causing Voldemort to look at him sharply. “It doesn’t matter. I choose my own destiny.”

“Then you have chosen death!” Voldemort hissed, smirking dangerously.

His wand flashed up, and Harry’s followed a split second behind.

“Avada Kedavra!” Voldemort shouted.

“Defodio!” Harry shouted.

His Gouging Spell and Voldemort’s Killing Curse met in the middle and connected, just as they had two short months ago in the graveyard. But it was different this time. This time, Harry knew he could win. With all his might, he pushed, forcing the golden bead in the middle closer to Voldemort’s wand while a golden cage formed around him.

Suddenly, Voldemort laughed.

“You still can’t win, Harry,” he shouted over the rush and sizzle of their colliding magic. “You still can’t kill me.”

“But we can,” Amelia said. “Surround him. As soon as Potter drops his spell, hit the bastard with everything you’ve got.”

Voldemort growled as the Aurors surrounded him behind and on the side, getting as close to the cage as they could. Amelia stood directly behind him with her wand aimed squarely at his heart.

“Get out of this, you son of a bitch,” she growled.

As Voldemort’s spell inched closer to his wand, its progress slowed. Harry didn’t know if he was fighting harder or if it was the magic at work, but he pushed forward, determined to win. He wouldn’t be able to release the spell until he did.

“You think you’ve won?” Voldemort asked, straining from holding back Harry’s magic. “You will never defeat Lord Voldemort.”

Everyone froze as a silvery-blue fox dashed through the wall and stopped next to Amelia.

“The Dementors have abandoned Azkaban. We’re under attack. Send help!” came a panicked wizard’s voice.

Harry’s stomach dropped as Voldemort laughed.

“What’s it going to be, Amelia?” he asked smugly. “Will you and your Aurors stay to kill me, leaving your guards to die at the hands of my Death Eaters, or will you abandon Potter to his fate to save them?”

Harry felt a white-hot rage course through his veins as Voldemort laughed manically. This whole time, he’d thought this was about him, but it was just another game. With a shout, he forced his magic forward with more power and determination than he ever had before. The laughter stopped abruptly when a golden bead the size of a Bludger surged towards Voldemort’s wand. This time, it didn’t slow as it got closer, continuing to plow forward.

“Noo!” Voldemort shouted.

Harry’s spell connected with Voldemort’s wand so violently that Voldemort was pushed back from the force, his bare feet sliding on the slick marble floor. Ghostly figures leapt from the wand one after the other, barely forming into recognizable figures before they swarmed around him.

“Now!” Harry shouted.

With a great heavy, he wrenched his wand free, ending the spell and causing the golden cage to collapse. Dozens of spells in a rainbow of colors rocketed towards Voldemort from all directions. They clashed in the middle, popping, exploding, and bursting against one another. Those closest to the spells stumbled back from the intense backlash.

But when the air cleared, Voldemort was gone.

“You can’t win, Harry,” he said, his voice echoing from everywhere. “I’ve already won.”

“Damn it,” Harry growled. “Get everyone to Azkaban, now! Professor, I need you to go with them.”

“Harry, I don’t think-”

“You and I are the only ones that can hold him off,” Harry said firmly. “If he shows up and we’re not there, he’ll slaughter them, and you know it. Now, either you go or I go, which is it?”

Dumbledore stared at him for a long moment before sighing.

“Very well,” he said.

Harry let out a breath he didn’t realize he was holding as Amelia got her Aurors together.

“Jones, I want you and your team to stay here and guard the Ministry,” she barked. “If anything happens here, you contact me immediately. I want all non-essential personnel evacuated and a constant guard on the Minister until this is over. Hargrave, Tonks, that means you. The rest of you, with me!”

Exhaustedly, Harry sat on a large chunk of concrete as the Aurors followed Amelia back to the elevator.

“Are you alright?” Penny asked, sitting next to him.

“Just tired,” he said, sighing. “And mad at myself. I should’ve known he was here for more than just me.”

“Stop blaming yourself, Potter,” Daphne told him. “It’s unattractive, and no one expects you to see everything coming.”

“You’re not a mind reader, Harry,” Hermione said more kindly. “You can’t know everything. If this was easy, we would’ve beaten Voldemort a long time ago.”

Harry sighed and nodded. He knew they were right, but that didn’t mean he had to like it.

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It was hours later when Harry looked up from his desk as the door opened. Amelia walked in, her robes tattered and burned, a thin cut running down her cheek.

“How bad is it?” he asked warily.

“Bad,” Amelia said, taking the seat across from him. “We lost all the prisoners except for Voldemort’s inner circle. I had them moved to a different wing in secret and enchanted it to remain hidden from the rest of the guards. Fortunately, Voldemort never showed up, and his Death Eaters didn’t find them. I think we managed to hurt him or at least wear him out.”

“How are the Aurors?” Harry asked.

“No one died, fortunately, but two may never work as Aurors again, and a further twelve were injured enough they needed to go to St. Mungo’s,” she told him, sighing tiredly.

Taking off his glasses, Harry rubbed his eyes with his palms. He was relieved that no one was killed but frustrated at the same time.

“So, all that work we did was for nothing,” he grumbled.

“This is a blow, I’ll admit, but it could’ve been much worse,” Amelia said, pouring a couple of drinks. “I’ll tell you this, though. I’ve never seen my Aurors fight as hard as they did today. You really inspired them with the way you stood up to Voldemort.”

“Well, at least I did something right,” Harry said, taking a large gulp of the amber liquid in his glass. “I feel like even when I win, I still lose, you know?”

“It might feel like that, but I still count today as a win,” Amelia told him, downing her glass in a single gulp.

“How do you figure that?” Harry asked.

“Most of his Death Eaters escaped, yes, but he would’ve recruited anyways,” she said, pouring another two fingers. “All we lost today was time. But we gained something more important. Hope. You probably didn’t notice, but those Wireless reporters were in the Atrium when you fought Voldemort. The whole nation just listened to you send him running from this building. What you said and did today is far more important than you understand.”

Harry shook his head. She was right, he thought; he didn’t understand.

“What’s going to happen with the election?” he asked to change the subject.

“It will be held first thing tomorrow morning,” Amelia replied. “Looks like you get to be Minister for just a little bit longer.”

“Great,” Harry sighed. “Just what I wanted.”