

Chapter 32

Saturday morning, Harry, Hermione, and Tonks woke early and made their way down to the Great Hall for a quick breakfast. Most students slept in on the weekend, so there were very few others scattered about the hall.

“So, what’s the plan for today?” Tonks asked, taking a bite from her sausage.

“You and Harry are going to check out the Chamber of Secrets while I start researching objects the Founders owned and their last known locations,” Hermione said. “We’ll meet back up for lunch and talk about what we’ve found.”

“You don’t want to check out Slytherin’s secret lair?” Tonks asked curiously.

“Harry took me down there a couple of years ago,” Hermione replied. “But if you find anything interesting, let me know at lunch, and I’ll go back down with you.”

“Fair enough,” Tonks shrugged.

Hermione finished her breakfast before Harry and Tonks and, after a quick goodbye, left for the library. Harry and Tonks took a little longer to finish up before they stood and got ready to leave the Great Hall.

“Hey, why don’t we take Daphne with us?” Tonks suggested.

“Why?” Harry asked, furrowing his brow curiously.

“Well, she probably knows how to think like a Slytherin better than either of us,” Tonks said, gesturing between them. Besides, if you show her the Chamber of Secrets, she might be willing to show you her appreciation.”

She wiggled her eyebrows suggestively, and Harry snorted in laughter. Glancing over his shoulder, he spotted Daphne eating with Astoria and Tracey and decided that it wouldn't be a bad idea to have her around.

"Alright," Harry said.

Tonks smiled and turned to the Slytherin table.

"Oi, Greengrass!" she shouted, drawing everyone's attention.

Daphne looked up, her cheeks turning pink while her housemates laughed as Tonks waved her arms, her hair flashed every color of the rainbow. With a glare, she got to her feet and stormed over angrily.

"What?" Daphne growled.

"Oh, don't get your knickers in a twist," Tonks said.

"You don't have to put up with their stupid, immature jokes," Daphne said, jabbing an accusing finger at Tonks. "Or Malfoy's incessant bitching."

"Well, if you'd rather not go see the Chamber of Secrets...," Tonks said, trailing off and smirking when Daphne's eyebrows shot up.

"The Chamber of Secrets?" she asked, turning to Harry. "You really know where it is?"

"Yeah," Harry said. "Dumbledore wants us to look for something down there. Do you want to come with us?"

Glancing back at Tonks, who grinned, she narrowed her eyes suspiciously.

“Yes, I would,” Daphne said as she turned back to Harry. “Just give me a minute.”

“Do you have to push her buttons?” Harry asked Tonks as Daphne walked back over to the Slytherin table and held a short, whispered conversation with her sister.

“No,” Tonks admitted with a smile. “But it’s fun.”

Harry smiled and shook his head while Daphne made her way back over to them. Together, they left the Great Hall, and Harry led them up to the second floor. Stopping outside Myrtle’s bathroom, he looked around to make sure no one else was around before slipping inside.

“Potter,” Daphne called, following after him. “What are we doing in here? This better not be some kind of prank.”

“It’s not,” Harry said, approaching the sink. “This is where the entrance is.”

“Slytherin put the entrance in the girls’ bathroom?” she asked, frowning her brow and wrinkling her nose cutely.

“Slytherin always seemed like a bit of a creep to me,” Tonks said, hopping up to take a seat on one of the sinks while Harry walked around, looking at the taps.

Harry smiled to himself as Daphne cocked her hip and gave her a flat glare.

“The Basilisk used the pipes to move about the school, so it would have to be close to one,” Harry said.

“Basilisk!?” Daphne asked incredulously.

“It’s dead,” Harry said. Hermione and I think this is just the entrance for it. We think Slytherin had another entrance he used—probably more than one. Jumping down a slime-covered slide isn’t exactly dignified. We just don’t know where any of them are.”

Spotting the tap with a snake etched into the side, Harry imagined it moving and slithering as if it were alive.

“Open,” he said.

He couldn’t tell if he spoke in Parseltongue or English until the sink shook and began to drop into the floor. Tonks yelped and jumped to her feet while Daphne took a step closer. They both watched in awe as the sink fell away to reveal a giant gaping hole in the floor.

“We have to go down there?” Daphne asked, eyeing the pitch-black pit dubiously.

“After you, wonder boy,” Tonks said, gesturing for him to go first.

Shrugging, Harry tightened his grip on his bag, stepped up to the edge, and jumped. The wind rushed past his ears as he fell before the pipe gently curved and caught his fall. He slid down the wet, slimy pipe for several seconds before he realized something very important. He’d put on some weight since he was a second year, and as a result, he was moving much faster than the last time he’d done this. Pushing his feet against the wall of the pipe, he tried to slow himself but couldn’t get any traction. With a muttered curse, he shot out the end of the pipe and landed hard on his back.

“Bugger,” Harry groaned.

Rolling over, he grimaced at the pile of bones that littered the floor and climbed to his feet. After using his wand to clean himself off, he cast a Cushioning Charm on the ground. He'd just tucked his wand away when he heard an excited whoop rapidly growing closer. Smiling, he braced himself and caught Tonks as she shot out the end of the pipe. Cheeks flushed and eyes sparkling, she smiled up at him gratefully.

"Thanks, love," she said when he set her on her feet.

While she cleaned herself off, Harry looked back up the pipe and listened, but he didn't see any sign of Daphne.

"Is Daphne coming?" Harry asked.

"AHHHH!"

Turning back to the pipe at the sound of a loud, high-pitched scream, he barely had time to brace himself before Daphne came shooting out of the end. He caught her like he had Tonks, but unlike Tonks, who'd worn jeans, Daphne was wearing a skirt. His hand unintentionally slipped under the fabric and landed on her panty-clad bum, his thumb pressed against the gusset.

As Harry set Daphne on her feet, her cheeks went pink. While Tonks tried to cover her snickers, she cleaned off her skirt and smoothed it out with her hand, desperately trying to exude an air of dignity.

"Please tell me the way out isn't that unpleasant," Daphne said.

"Er," Harry stammered, scratching the back of his neck.

"Potter," Daphne started in a dangerous tone, "please tell me you can get us out of here."

“I’m sure we’ll figure something out,” Harry said, then flinched when she turned her wand on him. “Relax. Tonks and I can cast a Patronus, and we still have the locket that Amelia gave us. We’ll be fine.”

“And you didn’t bother to think of a way back out *before* you jumped down here?” she asked incredulously. “How did you get out last time?”

“Fawkes flew us out,” Harry told her.

As if summoned by his words, they heard the cry of a Phoenix a moment before there was a flash of fire above their heads. Fawkes appeared in a blinding ball of fire and then warbled a warm greeting as he flew around in a circle. Harry smiled when he came to land lightly on his shoulder.

“Hey, Fawkes,” he said, reaching up to stroke his breast feathers.

“At least we have a way out of here now,” Daphne grumbled softly.

“I told you I’d figure something out,” Harry smiled.

She gave him an unimpressed look as he turned away, drew his wand, and walked up to the collapsed tunnel. As a second year, using magic to repair the damage had seemed an insurmountable challenge. Now, as a sixth year, all it took was a casual flick of his wand.

“Reparo,” Harry muttered.

The heavy stones ground and clicked together as they floated back into place. In a matter of seconds, the tunnel looked like it had never been damaged in the first place. As soon as the pathway was clear, several large, brown rats scurried away.

“Urgh,” Daphne grimaced. “Disgusting.”

“I guess with the Basilisk gone, there’s nothing to kill the rats,” Harry shrugged. “Ready to go?”

Getting an affirmative nod from the girls, he lit his wand and led the way deeper into the tunnel. Winding their way through the serpentine-shaped stone pipe, they soon reached the round, ornate door to the Chamber of Secrets.

“Open,” Harry said.

The golden snakes on the door retracted with a resounding *clunk* one by one. When the last one settled into place, the door opened outwards of its own accord. While Harry took a deep breath and mentally prepared himself to step back inside a place that had featured prominently in his nightmares over the years, Tonks and Daphne eagerly looked inside.

“Holy shit,” Tonks gasped.

“What the fuck is that?” Daphne asked.

Harry stepped through the entrance quickly, wand drawn, and shoulders tensed. Was there another Basilisk inside, he wondered worriedly. His eyes gazed around the Chamber, but he saw nothing out of place.

“What?” he asked.

Tonks and Daphne gave him identical incredulous looks and gestured in unison toward the large, white Basilisk skeleton sitting on the bridge that separated the two large pools of water.

“Oh, that,” Harry said.

“Yeah, that,” Tonks snorted.

“That’s the Basilisk I fought,” he told her. “Or, what’s left of it.”

“That’s the Basilisk!?” Daphne asked incredulously. “That’s a bloody monster! I didn’t even know they could get that big!”

“Well, it was down here for about a thousand years,” Harry shrugged.

“Even watching your memory didn’t do this justice,” Tonks said, walking up to the skeleton and stopping in front of its wide-open mouth. “Cor, this thing could’ve swallowed me whole.”

Shaking her head, Tonks turned around and hugged him tightly, her lips right next to his ear.

“If Daphne doesn’t fuck you after seeing that, then I sure as hell will,” she whispered softly.

Snorting, Harry wrapped his arm around Tonks and watched Daphne examine the skeleton closely. When she turned back to him, she looked completely at a loss for words.

“Potter,” she said eventually. “If that thing had gotten loose, it could’ve killed the whole school.”

“Let’s just be glad that didn’t happen,” Harry smiled. “Come on, let’s see if we can find anything. Hermione and I didn’t look around much the last time we were here.”

“What are we looking for, exactly?” Tonks asked.

“Any kind of hidden door or room,” Harry replied. “If it’s anything like the sink, it’ll be well hidden and probably marked with a snake of some kind.”

“And if it isn’t?” Tonks asked.

“Then it’ll probably look like that,” Daphne said, pointing to the massive carving of Slytherin’s face at the back of the Chamber. “And it’ll be easy to find.”

Scowling, Tonks stuck out her tongue. With a smile, Harry patted her bum and walked deeper into the Chamber. While the girls examined the walls for craved snakes or hidden doorways, he made his way over to the statue and commanded it to open. Peeking inside, he lit his wand and sent a ball of light down its mouth. The light bounced off of the back wall and fell down into a deep, dark pipe.

Even if there was something down there, Harry didn’t fancy jumping down to have a look. With a sigh, he stepped back and joined the girls in their search. They spent hours combing every inch of the walls and managed to finish about half the room before it was time for lunch. Walking back to the entrance, Harry and the girls hung onto Fawkes’ feathers as he flew them back up to the top.

While they were cleaning themselves off, Myrtle poked her head cautiously above the top of one of the stalls and sighed.

“Oh, it’s you,” she said, drifting through the door. “I got worried when I came back and found the sink open again.”

“Sorry, Myrtle,” Harry said. “Didn’t mean to scare you. Professor Dumbledore asked us to take a look around.”

“Oh! Well, if something bad happens down there, you’re still welcome to share my toilet,” Myrtle said with a flirtatious smile.

“Er, thanks, Myrtle,” Harry replied awkwardly.

Tonks rolled her eyes and grabbed his arm.

“Come on, lover boy, I’m hungry,” she said, pulling him toward the door.

Giving Myrtle a quick smile and a wave, he let himself be pulled out of the bathroom and down to the Great Hall. Daphne separated from them to go join her sister at the Slytherin table while Harry and Tonks took their places next to Hermione.

“Anything?” she asked hopefully.

“Not yet,” Tonks said as she loaded her plate. “How about you?”

“It’s going to take me weeks to find anything useful,” Hermione sighed. “There are literally dozens of objects from the Founders at Hogwarts, the Ministry, and the Wizarding Museum in Blackpool. Most of them are meaningless junk like desks they used or robes they wore.”

“I’m sure you’ll find something,” Harry said reassuringly. “In the meantime, Tonks and I will finish searching the Chamber, and then we’ll get started on the Room of Requirement.”

Hermione nodded and finished her lunch before heading back to the library. Harry and Tonks followed her lead, eating quickly and then grabbing Daphne from the Slytherin table. Returning to the Chamber of Secrets, they resumed their search for any hidden doors.

“Potter!” Daphne yelled excitedly.

Harry spun around and saw her standing next to the statue of Slytherin and waving him over. Sharing a look with Tonks, they jogged over. As they reached her, Daphne pointed to a lock of hair just below the ear. Harry brought his wand closer for better light, but it still took him a moment to see what had Daphne so excited. One of the strands of hair, longer than the others, looked scaly, and as he followed it to the end, it had the head of a serpent.

“Brilliant,” Harry grinned. “*Open.*”

Furrowing his brow, he glanced over his shoulder at Tonks and Daphne.

“Was that English?” he asked.

“Sounded like hissing to me,” Tonks shrugged.

“Slytherin must have used a different phrase to open the door,” Daphne said.

“Great,” Tonks muttered sarcastically, throwing her arms up in the air.

“He must’ve left a clue somewhere,” Daphne said.

Drawing their wands, Tonks and Daphne started casting Revealing and Detection Charms at the statue and walls. Harry, however, focused on the snake. Dumbledore had shown him that it was possible to feel magic, or rather, listen to it when they went to fetch Slughorn. This seemed like as good a time as any to try it himself. Closing his eyes, he placed his hand on the snake and listened.

For several seconds, there was nothing, but just before he was about to give up, he felt it. It started with a tingle in his fingertips, and then an image flashed in his mind: a splash of crimson accompanied by the taste of iron on the tip of his tongue. Harry’s eyes flew open in surprise; he dropped his hand and took a step back.

“Blood,” he murmured.

“What?” Daphne asked.

"It needs blood," Harry said.

"How do you know that?" she asked curiously.

"I felt it," he said.

"Of course you did," Tonks said, rolling her eyes. "Mad Eye's been trying to teach how to do that for years, and you pick it up on the first try."

Shrugging, Harry smiled and scratched the back of his neck.

"I think you're missing the bigger picture," Daphne huffed. "How are we going to get Slytherin's blood to open the door? You-Know-Who is his only known living heir, and I doubt he's going to just waltz in here and give it to you."

"Right, bugger," Tonks grumbled.

Harry couldn't help but glance down at his arm, the same arm that Pettigrew had cut to take his blood for the ritual that resurrected Voldemort.

"But he has my blood," Harry said softly. "Voldemort used it in the ritual that brought him back."

"I don't think that's how it works, Harry," Tonks sighed.

"Actually, it might," Daphne said thoughtfully. "That's not too far off of how adoption rituals work. The enchantments might recognize the magic, if not the blood."

Nodding, Harry turned back to the statue and took a deep breath. He brought the tip of his wand to his thumb and used the Cutting Charm to create a small nick in the skin. Blood oozed

out, and he quickly wiped it on the statue. The three of them waited with bated breath, but after several long seconds, nothing happened.

“Well, it was worth a try,” Daphne said, stretching her arms over her head.

“Can we just blow it open?” Tonks asked, causing Daphne to roll her eyes.

“*Open,*” Harry hissed.

With a rumble and the sound of stone grinding on stone, a square section of the statue just below the ear moved backward and to the side. It revealed a narrow, square hallway, although it was too dark to see where it led.

“You did it!” Tonks cheered.

Smiling and letting out a breath, Harry lit his wand and held it up.

“Let’s find out where it leads,” he said.

Harry stepped into the tunnel first, and instantly, torches along the walls burst to life. Cobwebs that had sat for years were rapidly burned away or left fluttering as they clung to the walls. The tunnel was surprisingly short, leading, Harry guessed, to the back of the statue, where a wooden door sat with a brass knob in the middle. Tonks cast almost a dozen Detection Charms on the door before giving Harry a nod. Cautiously, he reached out and gripped the handle. It turned easily in his hand, and the door swung inward on creaking hinges.

On the other side of the door was a large, square room. Directly in front of and facing the door was a desk covered in a thick layer of dust and old cobwebs. Against the left-hand wall sat a table laden with cauldron, ladle, cutting board, and knives. Next to that were three wooden cabinets, presumably used to store potions ingredients. Along the back wall, on either side of a fireplace, stood a pair of tall bookcases full of books with worn covers, the dust so thick he

couldn't hope to read the titles. In front of the fireplace sat a single wingback chair, a footstool, and a small, round table. On the right side of the room, partially hidden by a partition, he could just see the head of a bed, the covers tattered and dirty but still made. There was even still a black robe, moth-eaten and dusty, hanging from the corner of the partition.

"So," Tonks said, stepping inside, "this is Slytherin's secret lair. It's a bit disappointing."

"We haven't even looked around yet," Daphne reminded her.

She made a beeline for the bookcases at the back of the room, but Harry reached out and grabbed her arm.

"Be careful about what you touch, and let me know if you find anything... odd," he said.

Daphne looked at him curiously but nodded. While she made her way over to the bookcase, and Tonks began casting Detection Charms on everything in sight, Harry wandered around the room. He looked, listened, and felt around for any kind of familiar magic, anything that might be dark and sinister, but there was nothing.

"It's not here," he sighed.

Tonks turned to him sharply, "You're sure?" she asked.

Harry nodded and ran a hand through his hair.

"Damn it!"