

So when, not long after dinner, Remus sidled into the Great Hall and over to Harry, jaw clenched and eyes faintly glowing, Harry knew what was coming.

The countdown had begun.

“Here we go, then,” he said, releasing a deep breath. Remus nodded.

“Here we go,” he echoed. He cupped the back of Harry’s neck, pressing their foreheads together, scenting Harry’s temple. “Look after yourself, cub.”

“You too, Moony.” It took everything Harry had to pull away, offering the man a tight smile.

“It’s go time then, is it, chaps?” Fred asked briskly, watching the exchange. Harry nodded.

“Some time in the next few hours.”

“Least we got a good meal in first,” George commented. “I’d hate to go to war on an empty stomach.” He winked, and Harry laughed, even as his own dinner turned to lead in his gut.

“I’m going to find the others.” He looked at the twins, smirking. “Give ‘em hell, boys.”

The pair saluted, brown eyes bright.

The twins were Harry’s seconds, as far as the HA were concerned. They were the ones to get everyone mobilised.

Harry had his own work to do.

He got to his feet, keeping his shoulders back and his head high as every head in the room swivelled in his direction, the whispers starting to spread. He would not look scared. He would not show a hint of the anxiety buzzing inside him.

At the doors, a hand slipped into his. He looked down, meeting Luna’s smiling face. “Neville’s coming,” she assured. “The castle’s letting him know.”

Harry nodded, and they left, hand in hand. Sure enough, Neville met them at the stairs, dirt on the knees of his jeans from working in the greenhouses.

As they made their way upstairs, taking the long way for once, Harry noticed the signs of preparation. Underage students were being gently chivvied downstairs, ready to take refuge in the dungeons. People were walking that little bit faster, jaws set resolutely. They stepped aside for the three heirs, their eyes knowing.

They made it to the Hospital Wing, and Hannah took one look at them and grimaced. “How long have we got?” she asked simply. Harry glanced out the window, looking at the gates. There was no one there, yet.

He checked his watch. Quarter past eight. “I’d give it about two hours, maybe three. He won’t want to show too early.” He wanted to catch Harry at his weakest, at the moment of his