

Chapter 84

It was one of the rare times Harry and Snape were training together, without Draco or anyone else involved. They were only a few days away from returning to school, and the Slytherin was pushing Harry to his limits, making absolutely sure they had done everything they could. Not that their lessons would end when school began — Harry was fully expecting a slew of detentions in his future — but there were certain spells Snape wouldn't risk even in the Chamber of Secrets.

But after a full summer of pushing himself, Harry was very much starting to see the benefits; these days, duelling against Snape had him winning just as much as he would lose.

This was not one of those times, though; Harry blinked his eyes open to discover himself lying on the floor, Snape stood over him with a faint smirk on his face. Harry huffed, but accepted the hand to pull him to his feet.

“That frustration will get you nowhere,” Snape warned him. While Harry was getting better at using the man's first name out loud, he would still only ever think of him as Snape. “Remember, your duel with the Dark Lord is not likely to last as long as I have been training you for.”

“But how many people will I have to fight to get to him?” Harry retorted, running a hand through his hair.

“Should the battle go as planned, not nearly as many as you seem to expect.” Snape shot him a pointed look. “We are not sending you out onto a battlefield alone, Potter.”

Harry knew that, but he also hated the idea of any of his friends throwing themselves between him and a Death Eater's wand. “It still doesn't feel like enough,” he insisted. “I mean, I know you're one of Voldemort's best, but if I can't even guarantee a win against you...” He clenched his teeth in frustration. “He's going to be so much more ruthless than even you will be.” He knew Snape was duelling him as he would were he a loyal Death Eater, but the man couldn't deny he was still treating this as a training setting, not a proper battle. He never threw anything that would actually kill Harry before they got a chance to reverse it.

“Look at me, Potter.” Harry's gaze snapped up automatically, conditioned by years in the classroom with this man. Snape's dark eyes were intense as he stared Harry down. “You are capable of defeating the Dark Lord.” His voice was clear, curt, with absolutely zero doubt to it. Harry gaped at him. “You may have seen him duelling Albus Dumbledore and been impressed, but we both know neither of them were truly aiming to kill in that duel. They were aiming to intimidate. You have seen the way the Dark Lord fights when his emotions get the better of him; he is sloppy. Foolish. Far too arrogant — there is a reason he surrounds himself with so many powerful, competent fighters. Those fighters will be busy elsewhere when the final battle comes.” The man smirked slowly. “If nothing else, letting the Dark Lord know you have destroyed all his horcruxes will surely cause him to lose his composure long enough for you to finish him off.”