

especially as mad as he is now.”

“I suppose.” Most of the new arrivals to the castle were those here for safety, so their numbers for the fight hadn’t swelled that dramatically. Even with any spies in the castle reporting on their training progress — Harry wasn’t so naive to think Snape was the only Death Eater still around — Voldemort would likely be arrogant enough to think his sheer numbers could win it for him. Especially if the rumours were true, and he had the dementors on his side.

If Harry could give him enough of a reason to come here, enough of a reason to think he’d win...

“I’ll have to think on it, see how things go.” If Snape didn’t start hearing word of movement soon, Harry would have to take matters into his own hands.

His throat went dry at the thought of what came after. The battle itself. Him versus Voldemort — an entirely different animal to fighting Death Eaters. Most of Voldemort’s Old Guard, his original best duellers, had died either of age or battle; his current army were younger and inexperienced, and not all as dedicated to the cause as their predecessors were. He could handle Death Eaters.

Voldemort, however, had fifty years on Harry and knew more magic than Harry could even dream of knowing. Had done all sorts of rituals to strengthen himself, to expand his power, to draw magic from his Marked followers in times of need.

“I don’t know if I’m strong enough,” he admitted in a rasping whisper; words he had not said out loud to another living being, not even Draco. Words that lingered in the back of his mind at all times, reared up in his darkest moments of doubt.

“Look at me, lad,” Salazar said firmly. Harry did so. The founder was steel-eyed, his snake draped over his shoulders. “*You are a Slytherin,*” he hissed in Parseltongue, repeating his earlier words. “*You have the ancient blood of several strong families running through your veins, and when you are ready, the magic in that blood will rise to assist you. You are the most powerful young man I have seen in a very long time — you are dedicated, and talented, and you have far too much to live for. That **filth** is a stain on my lineage, with a shattered soul and magic so foul the family rejected him entirely. He is a shadow of a man, with false power and little sanity to speak of. You are already at an advantage.*” He didn’t blink, and Harry didn’t either, not daring to look away as the founder spoke so vehemently. “*Trust your magic, Harry Potter. It will not fail you. And **you** will not fail your family.*” He leaned back in his chair, smirking. “Do you understand?”

Harry nodded, drawing his shoulders up, feeling Salazar’s faith settle something in his soul. “You know the spell I taught you. And you know damn well that he’s going to be too busy gloating to see you as a legitimate threat. Don’t let that ridiculous Gryffindor nobility make you wait to take him in a fair fight — find your opportunity, and take it,” Salazar instructed, looking down his regal nose at the boy. “I finally have an heir I actually like, and you have promised me you will help restore my legacy. I expect you to keep that promise.”

Slowly, a smile crept across Harry’s features. “Yes, sir.”