

Harry ran a hand through his hair. “Face it, Severus. At this point, it’s the best we’ve got.” All his other plans had been far riskier. Far too *Gryffindor*, according to Salazar. “So will you do it? Will you go to him, convince him he needs to attack on my birthday?”

Slowly, Snape nodded. “I will try.” His eyes darkened in something like concern. “Are you ready?”

Harry’s answering smile was humourless. “I have to be.”

He couldn’t keep putting it off forever.

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Somehow, word spread. Even though Harry only told his closest allies of his plan with Snape, it got around that the battle was coming, and fast. Letters were sent out, the hope of last-minute allies from far reaching places. Potions were brewed, protections were reinforced, the elves and even the ghosts more alert than ever. Children were kissed, lovers were held, promises were whispered into the night. Promises that, for some, were sure to be broken.

Harry couldn’t leave his room without getting stared at like a specimen in a jar. No one asked him, but everyone wanted to know he had a plan. Everyone wanted to be sure that their saviour would come through.

This whole battle would be pointless if Harry couldn’t kill Voldemort, once and for all.

The evening of the 29th. Harry didn’t bother going down to dinner. He asked Dobby to bring him a plate, and he and Draco ate dinner on the sofa in front of the fire in the Gryffindor common room. And slowly, people joined them.

Neville and Ginny, tucking themselves away in the armchair. Remus, ruffling first Harry’s hair and then Draco’s. Narcissa, not touching any of them but looking at the boys like they might disappear if she turned away. Sirius and Charlie, settling on the floor, leaning back against Harry’s shins. One by one, his friends, his family, gathered in the common room — even Snape, a shadow lurking in the corner, a dark guardian angel behind Remus Lupin’s chair.

No one spoke, but they didn’t have to. There were no words they could say to make it any easier. Not when everything sounded like a goodbye.

So they sat together, listening to the quiet breaths around them, the crackle of the fire, basking in the love that flooded the room, heavy with the knowledge that this may well be the last time all of them sat in a room together.

Harry leaned into Draco’s embrace, breathing in his scent, until the sun had fully set outside.

“I think I’m going to bed,” he said eventually, breaking the silence between them all. “Long day tomorrow.”

Someone snorted. It might have been Fred.