

“You mean no one told you? Merlin, it’s like they *want* you to die,” Malfoy muttered disparagingly. “Sirius Black? Ring any bells?”

“Wait— The escaped criminal? What’s he got to do with anything?” Malfoy sighed impatiently.

“Do those glasses even work, Potter? The man’s face is up on wanted posters all over Diagon! He broke out of Azkaban.”

“Yeah, I know that,” Harry replied slowly, wondering why he should be any more scared than anyone else.

“He was one of the Dark Lord’s most loyal supporters. And, rumour has it,” Malfoy gave a vicious smirk, “he’s after you, Potter.”

Harry’s heart stuttered. “What?”

“He’s coming for you. Talking in his sleep, the same words — ‘he’s at Hogwarts’. He wants revenge for his Lord, so you’d better watch out, Potty.”

Malfoy sounded gleeful, but he actually looked a little disturbed that Harry had been left alone under the circumstances. Harry thought about all the times he’d been alone and unguarded — his trip to muggle London, his forays into the emptier parts of Diagon Alley. No wonder Fudge had been waiting for him when he’d arrived. He probably thought Black had got him.

But in that case, why *hadn’t* he been given a guard?

Shaking his head and figuring it was probably all part of some scheme of Dumbledore’s, Harry turned back to Malfoy. “Well, he’s not likely to come into the middle of Diagon Alley, is he? I’m perfectly safe.”

“Are you?” Malfoy retorted with a smirk. “I suppose at least you can defend yourself here. If you were capable of that, anyway,” he added disparagingly. Harry stared blankly at him again. “Sweet Salazar, they really don’t tell you *anything*!” He pulled his wand, and Harry automatically took a step back, but all the blond did was send out a trail of green sparks that formed a hissing snake before fading out. “Underage magic can’t be traced in Diagon Alley,” he informed Harry smugly. “There’s too many people around for them to tell who cast what. As long as no one sees you, you can cast what you like.”

“Well I wish I’d known that *before* I got here,” Harry muttered, thinking of all the spells in *A Hundred Spells Every Wizard Should Know* that he’d been desperate to try out for days. Two whole weeks, wasted! “Why are you telling me all this, Malfoy? I bet you’d love to see Sirius Black get me.”

“There’s something different about you, Potter,” Malfoy remarked, eyeing him over with his arms folded over his chest. “I feel like it’s going to make the year... interesting. It’d be a shame if you died before I could see how Weasley’s going to react to your new look. Silverling’s isn’t cheap.” Harry was wearing his new jacket, but he hadn’t expected Malfoy to