

The castle knew what it wanted — Harry was just a vessel, his magic reaching for the threads of emerald green magic within the stone, the colour pooling under his fingertips inside the crystal. In his mind's eye, he could see the wards start to rebuild themselves; the wards keeping dangerous creatures out of the school reforming; the wards to alert the staff of students in danger filling with magic once more. So many aspects of the school that had been ignored for so long, to the point where most people alive had likely forgotten they even existed to begin with.

None of the *trials* Dumbledore had put him through in his years at Hogwarts would have been possible under the wards at full strength.

Now he was much deeper within them, he realised they had not begun to fade *just* when Dumbledore had become headmaster — some time before that, likely during Grindelwald's rise to power. When Dumbledore was just a Transfiguration teacher.

Had he done something then, to disrupt the wards' connection with the actual headmaster? Started seeking his power even at such an early point?

Started supplementing his own power with that of the Hogwarts wards?

For it was inordinately clear that was what Dumbledore had been doing, at least for the last few decades — with the amount of ambient magic around the students, not to mention the magic naturally within the land Hogwarts was built on, it shouldn't have been possible for the wards to get so weak without the magic being directed elsewhere. That was why the founders had built Hogwarts on this spot — that was why their family magics were so strange, so deeply intertwined with the castle. After everything the founders put of themselves into it, and all those decades of them living within the castle while the magic was so new and volatile, it had changed the family magics so they were unlike anything seen elsewhere; so they were all interlocked, and far more sentient than any other magics had been discovered to be.

The magic tangled through the four of them, pulling the wards away from Dumbledore and linking them to those of founders' blood. Harry wondered with a panic if Dumbledore might notice, but the castle soothed him in his mind, a flicker of mischief dancing across his skin. Things would be fine.

With their power imbued in the castle, with the wards finally allowed to flourish once more, Hogwarts would handle everything. The heirs just had to protect themselves, and protect the school from Dumbledore and others like him.

They could have been in there for hours. Days, even. Time lost all meaning as Harry descended into the castle's magic, his brain filling with an *awareness* unlike anything he'd ever felt before. The kind of awareness the head of school was supposed to have — awareness of the students and their safety, of the ghosts and the elves and the lake and the forest.

The kind of awareness that kept students safe. The awareness that had been lacking for the entirety of Dumbledore's Hogwarts career.