

horcruxes and finally rid the world of the darkness that has plagued it for so long now.” His smile turned sharp. “Maybe then everyone will stop believing those silly lies of yours and be properly grateful for everything I’ve done for them.”

He paused, chuckling to himself, glancing at Harry. “The thing they don’t tell you about power, my boy, is that once you have it, the people who gave it to you often have no idea what it truly takes to keep it. They think you can solve all of their problems, without the faintest idea of the work you do just to keep them alive and well.” He chuckled again, shaking his head. “But it is no matter.”

The headmaster leaned back in his conjured chair, expression turning thoughtful. “It surprises me to hear you speak of horcruxes — though perhaps it shouldn’t, considering how long you have been one. How long has he been whispering in your mind, I wonder?” He surveyed Harry sadly. “You never stood a chance, did you, my boy.”

Finally, he stood, pulling his wand from his pocket. Harry tensed. “I must return to the castle for a while — no doubt someone has noticed your absence. I must calm the students and direct the search to the appropriate places.” With a wave of his wand, the chair vanished. “Perhaps, if I play this carefully, your tragic demise at the hands of Death Eaters will be enough for Horace to finally tell me the truth of what he knows.” He pursed his lips. “How the man doesn’t see that we’re running out of time, I’ll never know. He’s always been a fool.”

Abruptly, he seemed to remember where he was, that he had company. He smiled that grandfatherly smile at Harry, raising his wand. “I am sorry about this, my boy, but I cannot risk you doing anything reckless before I can return.”

As magic began to gather around him, a stream of Latin pouring from his lips, Harry could do nothing but lie there and scream.

.-.-.-.

Neville didn’t care that he was missing classes. His teachers would understand — they, too, knew that Harry was missing by now. *Everyone* knew that Harry was missing by now.

After he’d left Snape’s office, Neville had gone to the Room of Requirement, asking for the Wardstone, hoping against hope that with his hands on the crystal he might be able to get a better view of what happened. Hogwarts obliged, but there was nothing more it could offer — just that darkened vision of Harry getting hit in the back with a Stunner, falling like a sack of soil.

That vision would haunt Neville’s sleep for a long time, after this.

He called Lord Black — *Sirius* — again, to tell him he’d gone to Snape as asked. Sirius was with Tonks and Kingsley Shacklebolt, which instantly made Neville feel better. He’d told them, what Snape said, about it being Dumbledore rather than Death Eaters. They looked like they’d come to that conclusion all on their own.

Neville felt so useless — he wasn’t powerful like Harry, or connected like Draco. He didn’t know half of what really went on in Harry’s life these days, only the things it was safe