

“Susan, what time does the Ministry close up for the night?”

“Most people are out by six. Some will stay in their offices til seven or eight, but there’s not many these days. There’s a night-shift guard in the atrium, and I know the aurors have an on-call rotation, but I think they only usually have one or two people manning the emergency floo line and that’s it.”

The Ministry was probably mostly empty by now, then. Harry would bet anything that most of those still in their offices were those planning on aiding the Dark Lord’s attempt however they could, even if that was just with their own silence.

“One thing I want to know, Harry,” Ginny piped up, “is what You-Know-Who wants from you out of this whole thing. Considering how you’re so good at upsetting the cauldron on all his other plans, surely he’d want to keep you out of the way?”

Harry’s smile was a grim line. “Yes, but he also wants to kill me quite a lot,” he replied, and Daphne snorted. “He needs me to get something. From the Department of Mysteries. There’s... there’s this Prophecy, alright? About me and him, supposedly, and he’s heard the first half but not the second, and he thinks it’ll tell him how he can defeat me and live forever, or something.”

“You really are the Chosen One, then?” Daphne remarked dryly.

“A Prophecy is only as strong as those who believe in it,” Luna said. “Often the damage done from hearing them is worse than the prophecy itself.”

“Yeah, well, the damage done from him hearing the first half was going after my parents. And Neville’s,” he added with an apologetic glance to his friend. Neville gaped. “Child born at the end of July. Look, it’s not important.” Harry was getting off topic. “The point is, he expects me to meet him down in the Department of Mysteries. And I will. But not as blindly as he thinks. So. Plan.”

He wasn’t good at this part. Even without the compulsions rotting his brain, his idea of a ‘plan’ was ‘start with good intentions and make the rest up as I go along’. But he had others with him now, people whose safety relied on more than just dumb luck and good timing.

He wouldn’t lose any of them like he lost Cedric.

So, planning it was. Luckily, his friends were much better at that than he was.

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With a plan in place, Harry and his friends hid themselves under Disillusionment charms and headed for the statue of the one-eyed witch. Harry had considered the Shrieking Shack, but it would be a much harder task to get all six of them across the grounds unnoticed. He had never snuck so many people out of Hogwarts before, but he was fairly confident in his own abilities. Most of the school was finishing up dinner by now; he had to hope the rest of his friends were doing a good job of hiding their absence from Umbridge and anyone else who might care.