

“I want to train,” Harry declared. “Harder than last summer. I want to be as prepared as possible when the war comes. I know I’m young, but I’m part of this, and I’ll need to know as much as I can.”

“We know,” Remus agreed, and Harry blinked. He’d been prepared to fight for that one. “There’s no point in keeping you tucked away and hoping you’ll stay out of trouble. It hasn’t worked once yet,” he added with a brief grin. “The schedule might be a little more erratic, but we can work with you like we did last year. Severus will probably cover most of it; if anyone knows what you’ll need to know to fight Voldemort, it’s him.”

“We will do away with time devoted to practicing schoolwork,” Snape told him. “I have faith in your ability to pass your OWLs without a summer of extra preparation. I will teach you what I can, but you must be willing to learn. All of it.” His dark eyes bored into Harry’s. “Not all of what I have to teach you will be light. Sometimes you can only fight darkness with darkness.”

“I’ll learn it,” Harry said. “I trust you.” Snape wouldn’t teach him anything that wasn’t useful. He needed to know how the other side worked in order to fight them.

“Once we’ve learnt what the Order and Voldemort’s first moves are, it’ll be easier to plan more long-term,” Sirius said. “Getting rid of Voldemort won’t be simple, but there’s got to be a way, and I’d bet anything that Dumbledore knows what it is. He won’t tell anyone, of course, but maybe if he leaves enough hints we’ll be able to figure it out.”

“Surely whacking him with a killing curse will do the trick?” Harry asked, brow furrowed. The three adults looked grim.

“The Dark Lord has devoted a lot of time towards the study of immortality,” Snape revealed. “The fact that he managed to return at all means he must have managed it to some degree. Whatever magic he has performed must be reversed before we can be rid of him.”

The prospect of Voldemort being immortal had Harry’s lunch sitting heavy in his stomach. “Fantastic. Of course, the secret lies with Dumbledore. Merlin forbid he tell anyone just in case they steal his glory from him.”

“We’ll find a way,” Sirius vowed.

“How much am I letting Dumbledore control me this year?” Harry asked. “He’s bound to have some idea that the Compulsion charm hasn’t stuck by now. And I’ll be honest, I really don’t think I can force myself to go back to playing nice.” He’d made too many overt moves away from that behaviour, and if he went back to it he might not be able to do what he needed to do.

“Let him think you’ve simply grown too old and too strong for the Compulsion to stick,” Remus suggested. “If my suspicions are correct, he’s got bigger things on his plate right now, but as long as he can keep you close and downtrodden he’ll be happy. He might actually prefer you isolating yourself from Ron and Hermione, as long as he doesn’t see you gain too many new friends. He’ll want you to feel like you have nothing worth living for, whenever he’s ready to have you sacrifice yourself.”