

Chapter 95

Albus Dumbledore was a very intelligent man, but he had been underestimating Harry Potter for most of the boy's life, and that didn't seem to have changed.

Harry lay on the bed, ropes still holding him down, his eyes closed as he sank through the thick, crushing barrier between himself and his magical core.

Or, rather, between his magical core and the outside world, the ability to actually *use* that magic.

He wasn't sure how long he'd been unconscious, after Dumbledore had left. There was no window, no way for him to tell the time. It could have been days, for all he knew. His stomach didn't ache yet, but he'd faced starvation before — he knew he could go at least a couple of days before he'd really start to feel it.

He'd woken with a strong, unquestioning faith in Albus Dumbledore, and a burning desire to do whatever the man bid. Even through the thick blanket keeping his magic locked up tight, he knew that sensation wasn't right, squirmed at the constriction of the brand new compulsions, stronger than anything he'd felt before. So strong it took a long, long time for him to even notice there was something wrong.

Harry dreaded to think what might have happened had Dumbledore returned while he was in that state, pliant and trusting with every truth he knew about the headmaster turned to insignificant chatter in the back of his mind.

But his magic was strong, now. His awareness of himself even stronger. He recognised the compulsions for what they were, spent what felt like hours trying to slough them off his magic. Had to use all his strength of will to dive deep within himself despite the barriers in place — whatever blockers Dumbledore had put on him, it stopped him using magic externally, stopped him blasting his way to freedom. But the magic within him, the magic trying to dig tendrils into his mind and whispering for him to trust his headmaster — that was a whole different matter. That was something Harry could work with.

And once those were out of the way, he could work on the rest.

He was sweating with exhaustion, straining everything he had within him. His muscles ached, his head pounded, but none of it mattered. His only awareness was his own magic, pushing as hard as he could against Dumbledore's vice grip. Harry had no idea how much time he had before his captor returned; every second was vital. Sure, if Dumbledore returned soon Harry could pretend to be under the compulsions, hope the old man let his guard down long enough for Harry to make a move. But that was relying on far too many chances.

Namely, the chance that Dumbledore wouldn't immediately kill him, determined to rid Harry of *the evil within*.