

“I’m going back to the school,” he said, looking at Tonks as he spoke, barely even noticing the rest of the room. Tonks reached out as if to hug him, to say something, but let her hand fall awkwardly in the space between them.

“Okay. I... we’ll sort things out here.”

That was all Harry wanted. No one stopped him as he strode towards the floo, picking up the briefcase he had dropped in the fight. No one said a word as he grabbed a handful of green powder and tossed it into the flames, calling for the school and disappearing in a whirl of ash and flames.

The floo spat him out into the Great Hall. Harry took one look at the people gathered there — Sirius and Narcissa and Draco and Charlie, staring at him with confusion at his blank-faced gaze, at the familiar second wand in his hand — and turned on his heel, walking straight into the wall beside the fireplace.

He needed to be alone.

.-.-.

Alone, it turned out, was not quite how he ended up; in his emotional state the castle had interpreted his request for privacy in the usual way, taking him down to the Chamber of Secrets. The one place no other living person could reach, not even Neville — like Harry, he could now walk through walls in Hogwarts, but even the castle would not take him to Slytherin’s chamber without permission.

No other living person was down there. But the portrait of Salazar Slytherin had plenty to say about Harry’s abrupt arrival.

In a way, the castle did the right thing — Harry needed to talk to *someone*, but he needed someone who would understand, who wouldn’t judge him. Someone who had seen far too much of the world to be concerned by Harry’s fucked up and complicated feelings about the death of his old headmaster, technically at his hand.

“What if that’s what the Prophecy meant all along?” Harry pondered, lying on his back on the sofa in Salazar’s office, staring up at the ceiling. “What if defeating a Dark Lord meant both of them? I know Dumbledore wasn’t exactly a *Dark* Lord but he was certainly cruel and manipulative enough to count for something.”

“Does it change anything, if it did?” Salazar pointed out. “They’re both dead now. You still live. That is all that matters.”

“But... he was everything, to so many people. For a while he was everything to *me*.” Dumbledore had been the most incredible person in the world, to eleven year-old Harry. The man who had saved him from the Dursleys and brought him to this wondrous world of magic and warmth and *home*.

And then Harry had discovered the truth of it all, and everything had been ruined.