

Chapter 102

No one was excited for the end of year feast. No seventh years eager to graduate and join the adult world, no homesick first years keen to see their parents again. Gryffindor won the house cup, but it was not a celebrating matter.

There would be no Hogwarts Express in the morning. It was too dangerous, too big a target for attack. Voldemort would happily endanger children if it meant drawing the Light out to defend them.

Not everyone was staying. A lot of students, Harry knew, had families in safehouses already, and were desperate to join them. The parents at the Pottery were looking forward to having their children back with them.

And of course, there were those students who had nothing to fear from the wider world. Those who would go home to their families quite happily, live a fairly ordinary summer while their parents or cousins or siblings went off to serve a madman. The lucky students were the ones too young to be expected to fight.

Many students would be going home only to offer their arms up for branding. Marking themselves for death.

So it was a solemn affair that closed out the school year, Harry sat at his table with Neville on one side and Katie on the other. He kept his head down, stayed silent, ignored the whispers. His thoughts were already on the days to come.

At least he had recovered from the attack on the wards. Two days in the Hospital Wing, some potions, and a full twelve hours sleep had done wonders for him, and the other heirs. They had not bled themselves dry, not even close — they were reinforcing the wards with their strength, not offering up all their magic — but it was still an exhausting process.

Harry lingered in the hall after the empty dessert plates vanished from the table. He waved off the gentle concern of his friends, promising to see them back at the common room soon. He made his way up towards the staff table; McGonagall was lingering, too.

“All set for tomorrow?” he asked. The headmistress nodded sharply.

“I now understand how you were so sure of Miss Dunbar’s father’s whereabouts.”

Harry’s lips flickered in a weak smile — McGonagall had finally been made aware of the Pottery, and Grimmauld. Not of the secrets themselves, but of their existence, their purpose. It was the only way she would accept allowing Sirius to send over the portkeys for the students. “This war began long before the Ministry was taken, Professor,” he said, thinking back on the days when Voldemort had been just a vague threat, and the need to hide from Dumbledore was almost as urgent.